

# Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development

## A. Checklist for Starting a Cottage Food Business

As a resource and guide for those interested in starting a Cottage Food business in Michigan, the Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (MDARD) has created the following checklist:

### **Before you start your Cottage Food Business, you should:**

- Read the Michigan Food Law and Food Code to understand food safety, labeling, adulteration and other provisions of the law.
- Read the Cottage Food FAQs and other information available at [www.michigan.gov/cottagefood](http://www.michigan.gov/cottagefood).
- Check with your local unit of government to see if there are local regulations (e.g., zoning) that will affect your business.
- Determine your business structure and needs. You may want to contact your county office, the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs or a business advisor on specific steps. For more information, see *Section 1: Getting Started* of the *Cottage Foods: Frequently Asked Questions*.
- Determine the tax requirements for your business. You may want to contact the Michigan Department of Treasury or a Certified Public Accountant. For more information, see *Section 1: Getting Started* of the *Cottage Foods: Frequently Asked Questions*.
- Decide where and how you would like to sell your products and contact the market to determine its requirements (e.g., some farmers markets require liability insurance).

### **Before you start producing your Cottage Food products, you should:**

- Follow basic personal hygiene and food safety guidelines for your kitchen.  
MDARD suggestions:
  - Clean and sanitize your kitchen (floors, countertops, sinks), utensils, pots/pans, oven, etc.
  - Wear clean clothes, a clean hat or hairnet, food service gloves and a clean apron.
  - Take steps to prevent cross-contamination – use clean utensils, mixing bowls, cutting boards, knives, etc., for each food ingredient or product.
  - Never prepare foods for your family at the same time you are preparing Cottage Foods for your business. Set aside time in your kitchen for Cottage Food preparations only.

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- Keep pets and children out of the kitchen during your Cottage Food preparation. If you need to leave your kitchen during food preparation (e.g., to answer the phone, address the needs of a child, run to the store for more ingredients, etc.), remove your apron, gloves and hat before you leave the kitchen and wash your hands thoroughly when you return, before you handle food or food preparation tools.
- If you are sick, do not prepare food products for your Cottage Food business. It is better to lose a small amount of sales than to cause a foodborne illness outbreak.
- Store all Cottage Food products and ingredients properly. Keep them at least 6 inches off the floor and away from pests, household chemicals, and damp, insanitary conditions.

- Make sure you package your Cottage Food products in sturdy packaging to prevent product contamination.
- Make sure your product label meets all the requirements of the Cottage Food Law. See *Section 3: Cottage Food Labeling Requirements of the Cottage Foods: Frequently Asked Questions*.

**When selling your Cottage Foods, you should:**

- Use safe food handling practices at all times:
  - When transporting your Cottage Foods, make sure the vehicle is clean and your food products are transported in containers that will keep dirt, dust, bugs or other contaminants away from the food products.
  - When selling your Cottage Foods at the market, keep your booth clean and clutter-free, and protect your pre-packaged food products from contamination.
  - If you are serving samples, follow the “*Guidelines for Providing Safe Food Samples at Farmers’ Markets.*”
  - Wash your hands often during the market.
- Emphasize the steps you use to assure food safety as a marketing tool for your products. Consider highlighting the uniqueness of your product/business, and consider developing a logo or brand name for your products. For more marketing advice, visit [www.michigan.gov/mdamarketingguide](http://www.michigan.gov/mdamarketingguide).
- Maintain good production and sales records for your Cottage Food business. Records can 1) help trace ingredients to their source(s) in case of problems, and 2) help you track your business costs and earnings. Your records should include a list of ingredients by lot code (what you bought, when you bought it, from whom you bought it); and what food product(s) the ingredients were used for. You should also track sales at each market for each product so you can adjust your inventory or switch to markets that will bring a greater profit.

We wish you success with your Cottage Food Business! If you have questions about the Michigan Cottage Food Law, please contact MDARD at 800-292-3939 or [MDA-Info@michigan.gov](mailto:MDA-Info@michigan.gov).