

## **Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operations (MEHKO)**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

**1. *What is a Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operation (MEHKO)?***

Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operation (MEHKO) is a type of food facility that is operated by a resident in a private home kitchen. The MEHKO operator must live in the residence that is operating as a MEHKO. A MEHKO can only sell food directly to the consumer.

A MEHKO does not include either of the following:

- A catering operation
- A cottage food operation

**2. *Can a MEHKO sell to a wholesaler or retailer?***

No, a MEHKO can only sell food directly to consumers.

**3. *Do I need a health permit for a Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operation?***

Yes, a permit must be obtained from Environmental Health Services (EHS) prior to operation.

**4. *What kinds of food service is the MEHKO permitted to do?***

A MEHKO can prepare and serve foods that have been approved by Santa Barbara County Environmental Health Services for same day onsite consumption, takeout or delivery.

**5. *Is there a limit on the food a MEHKO can prepare and serve?***

Yes. MEHKOs have several limitations that they must follow. For example:

- Food must be prepared, cooked and served on the same day.
- A MEHKO operator may prepare and serve no more than 30 meals per day and no more than 90 per week (may be less depending on the proposed menu, kitchen, space and equipment available).
- A MEHKO may sell no more than \$100,000 per year in verifiable gross annual sales.

**6. *What foods are not approved to be prepared by a MEHKO?***

A MEHKO business may not prepare food or beverages that:

- Involve the production, service, or sale of raw milk or raw milk products.
- Involve the service or sale of raw oysters.

- Involve food processes that require a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point Plan (see follow-up question below for more information).

**7. *I have a MEHKO permit for my current residence and I am moving. Is my permit still valid for my new residence?***

No, permits are not transferrable to other people or other locations. If the MEHKO operator moves, changes their menu or type of food service, a new plan check and permit application will need to be submitted for approval by Santa Barbara County Environmental Health Services.

**8. *Can two MEHKO permits be issued for two residents that would like to operate a MEHKO out of the same residence?***

No, only one MEHKO may be permitted at a private residence.

**9. *What is the difference between a Cottage Food Operation (CFO) and a Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operation (MEHKO)?***

A CFO is restricted to preparing and selling only prepackaged non-potentially hazardous foods that have been approved. A MEHKO allows the limited preparation of potentially hazardous foods for onsite consumption or delivery when permitted by Santa Barbara County Environmental Health Services.

California Approved Cottage Foods List can be found here:

[CDPH Approved Cottage Food List](#)

**10. *Are MEHKOs inspected?***

Yes. MEHKOs are inspected annually by Environmental Health Services (EHS), just like other permitted food facilities. In addition, EHS can conduct inspections in response to a complaint about the MEHKO. Complaints about parking, noise, advertising / signage, garbage, or other violations of a city or county's applicable ordinances may also be investigated by City or County code enforcement agencies.

**11. *Can a MEHKO operate as a Caterer?***

No, a MEHKO may not operate as a Caterer.

**12. *Can a MEHKO support a compact mobile food operation (CMFO)?***

MEHKOs may serve as a commissary or mobile support unit for a CMFO, if this department finds it is capable of supporting the preparation and storage of food being sold from the CMFO.

**13. *Are commercial equipment and/or appliances required in a MEHKO?***

No, commercial equipment and/or appliances are not required as long as the equipment/appliances are maintained clean and are in good working order.

**14. *Are restrooms required to be available for MEHKO customers?***

Yes, clean toilet facilities, in good condition, shall be available for the MEHKO operator, food handlers, and any employees at all times. If the MEHKO allows customers to

consume food or beverages on site, the MEHKO must provide a restroom for those customers to use.

**15. *I have a septic system. Can I still have a MEHKO?***

A private onsite wastewater treatment system (septic system) serving a proposed MEHKO would need to be evaluated by EHS before a permit is issued, to make sure that the system is appropriately sized for the MEHKO. In some cases, upgrading the system may be necessary. Please contact EHS for more information.

**16. *Can I keep leftovers to serve the next day, or prepare foods, including condiments, beverages, or sauces, in advance?***

No, leftovers cannot be served the next day as part of the MEHKO operation. MEHKOs must prepare and serve all food and beverages on the same day.

**17. *Can a MEHKO operate an open-air barbecue or an outdoor wood-burning oven?***

Yes, a MEHKO may operate an open-air barbecue or an outdoor wood-burning oven as long as the barbecue or oven is operated on the same premises as the MEHKO.

**18. *Can alcoholic beverages be sold from a MEHKO?***

MEHKOs must have a valid license from the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control in order to sell, serve, provide, or allow alcohol to be consumed on-site at the MEHKO. For more information see the following website: [www.abc.ca.gov](http://www.abc.ca.gov).

**19. *Can I change my MEHKO's menu after I receive my health permit?***

Contact Environmental Health Services before changing your menu to find out what will be required.

**20. *What food safety training or certification is required for a MEHKO?***

Everyone who is involved with the preparation, storage, or service of food in a MEHKO must have food safety training, as follows:

- The operator of the MEHKO shall obtain a California approved Food Protection Manager Certification.
- Any individual, other than the operator, who is involved with the preparation, storage, or service of food in a MEHKO, shall obtain an approved food handler card.

---

If you have any questions that have not been answered in these FAQs, or if additional clarification is needed, please visit Santa Barbara County Environmental Health Services website at:

<https://www.countyofsb.org/414/Environmental-Health>

Or call us at 805.681.4900 (Santa Barbara) • 805.346.8460 (Santa Maria)