

# Profile from the Field

**Contact:** Marie Flanagan, NCR SARE Communications Specialist  
120 BAE, Univ. of Minnesota | 1390 Eckles Ave. | St. Paul, MN 55108  
ph. 612.625.7027 | f. 612.626.3132 | mart1817@umn.edu

## Paving the Way for Shared-Use Kitchens

**Project Title:** Economic Viability of Shared-Use Kitchens in the North Central Region  
**Coordinators:** Rhonda Phillips, Jodee Ellett  
**Location:** Purdue University, Indiana

**SARE Grant \$:** \$135,819

**Duration:** 2015-2019

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**number LNC15-374**

New cottage food laws are making it easier for producers to can, freeze, bake, and pickle their raw agricultural products at home and sell them directly to their customers. While they might fit under the regulations, home kitchens might not be a good fit for everyone, and there are also producers who want to expand without investing in their own commercial kitchen. Shared-use kitchens (sometimes referred to as kitchen incubators or commercial kitchens) are licensed commercial spaces that can give producers and other food entrepreneurs the space and community resources they need to develop their products and businesses.

As a former producer and local food supporter, Jodee Ellett is curious about shared-use kitchens. She works with the Sustainable Food Systems Science project at Indiana University and has been working on building sustainable food systems in Indiana since she started farming in 2011. While serving as the local foods coordinator for Purdue University in 2013, she became interested in the opportunities that shared-use kitchens could provide—she was also aware that the pathway to launching one could be rocky.

“I was very curious to learn who was using shared kitchens, how different models of kitchens remain viable, and why,” said Ellett. “What are the key factors that lead to sustainability for the kitchens? What services do kitchens need to provide for users, and how can a nonprofit, government organization, or business understand the breadth of issues when considering a shared-use kitchen in a community?”

With support from a \$135,819 NCR-SARE Research and Education grant, Ellett worked with Purdue Extension Services, Ashley Colpaart with The Food Corridor, and Fruition Planning and Management to survey shared-use kitchen operators, organize tours, and develop materials.



*Shared Kitchen Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Planning, Launching, and Managing a Shared-Use Commercial Kitchen* showcases successful models and provides information for planning, launching, and managing a shared-use kitchen.

The team surveyed regional kitchen owners and managers to learn more about their work. Ellett said the 92 responses to their survey helped them understand the viability,

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sustainability, and economic impact of shared-use kitchens. As a follow-up to the regional survey work, Econsult Solutions recently completed a nationwide survey for kitchen incubators to identify industry trends and offer insight into how shared-use spaces approach challenges. A preliminary analysis of the 180 responses has shown that kitchen incubators need increased awareness, consistency in regulations, and more financing opportunities. Ellett says this kind of data is what shared-use kitchen operators need.

“It is important for shared kitchens to have data to deliver when it comes to economic development decisions,” explained Ellett. “Most shared-use kitchens are nonprofits and have a socially-driven mission, in addition to economic and environmental goals. They are major connectors in a food system and can become a keystone business for a thriving local food economy.”

Following the tours conducted through the grant project, tour participants reported an increased understanding of shared kitchens, and the challenges of starting and sustaining them.

“I’m in the process of opening a commercial kitchen in Minneapolis,” said one tour participant. “I found value in meeting others who are involved with kitchens and learning from the kitchens we visited. The operational intelligence was invaluable. My learnings will help shape how I operationalize my kitchen.”

Informed by the survey and tours, the team started to formulate useful management practices for the day-to-day operations of shared-use kitchens. This culminated in the publication of the *Shared Kitchen Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Planning, Launching, and Managing a Shared-Use Commercial Kitchen*.

The guide showcases successful models and provides information for planning, launching, and managing a shared-use kitchen. Referred to by some as ‘the bible’ for shared-use kitchens, the guide has helped bolster momentum for more industry research.

You can download the Shared Kitchen Toolkit online at [www.northcentralsare.org/Educational-Resources/SARE-Project-Products/Shared-Kitchen-Toolkit](http://www.northcentralsare.org/Educational-Resources/SARE-Project-Products/Shared-Kitchen-Toolkit).



Tours of shared-use kitchens like the Washtenaw Food Hub in Michigan (middle) and Chef Space in Louisville, Kentucky (lower) were an integral part of the research process that culminated in the development of the *Shared Kitchen Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Planning, Launching, and Managing a Shared-Use Commercial Kitchen*. You can download the Shared Kitchen Toolkit online at [www.northcentralsare.org/Educational-Resources/SARE-Project-Products/Shared-Kitchen-Toolkit](http://www.northcentralsare.org/Educational-Resources/SARE-Project-Products/Shared-Kitchen-Toolkit).

View survey data and read more about this NCR-SARE Research and Education grant project online at <https://projects.sare.org/LNC15-374/> or contact the NCR-SARE office.

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