

https://www.dailyrepublic.com/news/sustainable-solano-offers-home-kitchen-business-workshops/article_87818014-8d89-11ef-8554-1315483256a0.html

Sustainable Solano offers home-kitchen business workshops

Todd R. Hansen

Oct 20, 2024



Melissa Edwards, left, teaches a hands-on cooking class funded through the CDFA funding that is also supporting the MEHKO workshop series. (Courtesy photo)

FAIRFIELD — Melissa Edwards has already shown home cooking can mean a lot more than feeding family and friends.

It can be a business.

She opened one of the Solano County's first home-based restaurants, Enchanted Cottage Kitchen, in 2021 – crafting a rotating, seasonal menu of homemade “classic comfort foods.”

Much of what she uses she grows in her "food forest," which Sustainable Solano helped create.

“We’re all about food around here. Always have been,” Edwards told the Daily Republic just a couple of weeks after opening her Vallejo home business.

Now Edwards will be a presenter in a program offered by Sustainable Solano and the Napa-Solano Small Business Development Center: A free training program for other Solano County residents who would like to become commercial home cooks through the Micro-Enterprise Home Kitchen Operations ordinance.

"The program will be a hybrid, with some sessions hands-on in Fairfield and others held online," organizers said.

The first virtual MEHKO 101 presentation is scheduled for 6 to 7 p.m. Oct. 23, focusing on the fundamental basics of starting a home-kitchen business and sharing more about the training workshop. Space will be limited for the hands-on training, so interested participants are encouraged to attend the virtual presentation and sign up early.

"It is just a way to start a restaurant, but on a much smaller scale and much smaller risk," Noah Galgan, Cooking Education & Training Program manager, said in an interview on Thursday.

"Our vision is to really inspire people who like to cook, and how they can support local farmers and to feed the community," Galgan added.

One of the farming operations that participates in the Community Ag Program is Terra Firma Farms in Winters.

"Collectively, we usually work with ... six or seven farms," Galgan said. "It is focused on specialty crops, everything that is not a commodity."

The farms have been located in Solano, Yolo and Sonoma counties.

"We live in a food system and we need to support our local farmers," Galgan said.

Or, like Edwards, participants can learn to develop their own garden sources.

"I think for us (at Sustainable Solano) it is about educating about local food and farms," Galgan said.

Sustainable Solano also conducts a host of food and cooking demonstrations around the county, and has home and community garden programs as well.

"So we just saw (the program) as an opportunity," said Galgan, a 2019 Vacaville High graduate who had his studies at Westmont College in Santa Barbara cut short by the Covid-19 pandemic. But because he was paying his way through college by working in restaurants, he did find his passion.

"I just had the love of cooking and healthy food," he said.

He went to work at Rosemary's Farm to Fork in Dixon, and when the Sustainable Solano position opened, he walked through that door.

Another partner in this is Cook Alliance, a nonprofit working to validate home cooking operations as legitimate businesses and to support those companies.

"This year they rolled out an opportunity to be part of a cohort to educate more about home kitchen operations through an online academy. In total, they will be putting 500 people through (the academy)."

Galgan said the Sustainable Solano MEHKO program is supported by a two-year, \$500,000 state Department of Food and Agriculture grant that runs through next June.

It is based on a three-pronged, cocktail fork philosophy of incubation, innovation and inclusion – the last of which is particularly important because home-based kitchens – or any similar business – can be the affordable way to get a business started and to grow it.

Galgan said some of the participants are interested in having a brick-and-mortar restaurant someday, while others are content to be homebound.

The law allows a home-based restaurant to produce 30 meals a day or 90 meals per week, and generate \$100,000 in gross revenue annually.

Sustainable Solano hopes as many people who want to learn about knife skills, food safety and other topics get involved in the online workshops. However, the in-person training will be much more limited.

The SBDC can marry those skills – through this program and others – with learning about business needs, including accounting, employee management, branding and marketing.

"We do want to take this to the technical side of business management," Galgan said.

Register for the first virtual presentation at www.eventbrite.com/e/mehko-101-virtual-presentation-tickets-1043293828927.

[Learn more about your privacy options](#)