

Western New York Food Enterprise Center

In the Fall of 2014, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Niagara County was awarded federal funding under the Local Food Promotion Program of the Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture to conduct a feasibility study for a food enterprise center. The proposed facility will serve small and mid-size farmers who are looking to produce value-added products, food business entrepreneurs who want to develop new products for market, and will also be an outlet for community education. The center would potentially have a shared-use commercially licensed kitchen in which to prepare and package products. In addition, the center would be a resource center for farms and food business owners to access programs and services to support the growth of their business.

Throughout 2015, data was collected, through surveys and interviews, to determine if people would be interested in using a facility such as this and, if so, what type of equipment they would like available at the facility. After tabulating the survey results, we have found that individuals, farmers, current food business and other community organizations are very interested in this type of facility. A summary of the results follow.

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Survey Results

Survey #2: 19 participants

Survey #3: 26 participants

The majority of survey #2 participants (59%) are not currently producing a food product for sale but 63% make a product they are interested in possibly selling. 78% of survey #2 participants said their products are wet-packed, 11% dry packed and 22% packed another way. Survey #3 had similar results. The majority of survey #3 participants' (59%) products would be wet-packed, followed by 32% dry-packed and 23% would be packed another way.

Equipment needs

Survey #2 participants indicated they were most interested in the following equipment: filling and packing equipment, walk-in cooler, food processor, dishwasher, stainless steel table, labeling equipment, storage space, and kitchen utensils. Equipment that some survey-takers identified include: a standard range/oven, commercial mixer, flash freezer, computer and a refrigerator.

Survey #3 participants said they were most interested in: standard range/oven, commercial mixer, filling and packing equipment, walk-in cooler, food processor, dishwasher, stainless steel table, labeling equipment, storage space, vacuum packaging, and kitchen utensils. Some participants were also interested in: steam jacketed kettle, walk-in freezer, convection oven, grinder/blender, juice presser/juicing equipment, commercial dehydrator, microwave and refrigerator.

Facility

The majority (82%) of the participants for survey #3 said they would be willing to travel up to thirty miles to access the WNY Food Enterprise Center. 100% of the participants in both survey #2 and survey #3 who said they would use the kitchen space on a regular basis, indicated they would use the shared use commercial kitchen between 1 and 10 hours a week. Additionally, participants in survey #2 said they would be willing to pay up to \$20/hour to use the facility. Most participants in survey #3 (57%) said they would be willing to pay between \$5 and \$15/hour to use the facility.

Support Services

Other than the commercial kitchen space, the WNY Food Enterprise Center will provide other services. 100% of participants in survey #2 said they would be interested in food safety consulting services, and assistance accessing local produce, meats, and/or dairy. Other services that participants of survey #2 expressed interest in are: label design assistance, assistance accessing wholesale goods, food photography and direct market surveys. Survey #3 participants indicated they are most interested in label design assistance, food safety consulting, assistance meeting local, state and federal health regulations, and marketing assistance. Additional services survey #3 participants said they would like are: assistance accessing wholesale goods/group purchasing, food photography, web development, food safety education, business start-up, and nutritional considerations for prepared meals or food products.