

Ramirez, Angelica

Public Comment - Group 1

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From: Roxanne Rosensteel <xannyr@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 10, 2021 4:00 PM
To: sbcob
Subject: Support MEHKO's



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Hi,

My name is Roxanne and I am a local chef in Santa Barbara. I'm reaching out to support MEHKO programs (AB 626, AB 377). Allowing people to cook from their homes is a simple easy way to bring new jobs, healthy and diverse food options, and to strengthen neighborhoods. I can say personally and for my peers that the ability to prepare foods to sell from my home would lower the barrier to entry for starting a cooking business. Most workers in the food industry (myself included) are paid low wages—unless you have a wealthy benefactor or some other financial source, the possibility of starting your own food business is simply not accessible. Allowing individuals to apply for MEHKO permits would diversify, democratize and enrich the local food scene, as well as boost the economy. I can also say on behalf of myself and my peers that safely preparing meals is of the utmost importance—making these permits available would increase the health and safety of the community by increasing regulations surrounding the preparation of foods. Support local chefs, support MEHKO's.

Thank you

Best,
Roxanne

Ramirez, Angelica

From: Peter Ruddock <peter@cookalliance.org>
Sent: Monday, May 10, 2021 4:19 PM
To: sbcob
Subject: Comments on Agenda Item 21-00418

Caution: This email originated from a source outside of the County of Santa Barbara. Do not click links or open attachments unless you verify the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Santa Barbara County Supervisors,

I am the Policy Director of COOK Alliance. We, along with our predecessor company, Josephine, were the sponsors of AB 626, the Homemade Food Operations Act. We were also proponents and co-sponsors of the CCDEH-sponsored AB 377, the bill to clean up AB 626. We have also worked with those counties and cities which have so far adopted AB 626 in their jurisdictions, namely Riverside, Imperial, Lake, Solano, Alameda and the City of Berkeley, as well as participating in your own efforts. We are also talking with another ten or so counties and cities which would like to adopt the law in the not-too-distant future, most notably Sonoma, San Diego and the City of Long Beach. We have also advised the successful effort to enact a similar law in Utah and are advising an effort to enact one in Washington. As you can see, we have been in this for a while - since the beginning! - and will be in it for the long haul.

While we started out primarily as supporters of Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operations (MEHKOs), we are in fact supporters of all small food businesses. We are advisors to Assemblymember Rivas for the Cottage Food Amendments bill, AB 1144, currently before the Assembly. We are champions of not only cottage food operators, but food trucks, farmers markets, farmstands, farm dinners and independent restaurants. The common denominator for us is that we want to support food businesses that are locally owned, locally sourced where possible, permitted and safe.

Some people have questioned the safety of food produced by a MEHKO. We know that in the years of planning, research and negotiation, between us and Assemblyman Garcia's office, food policy groups at Harvard, UCLA, Univ of Colorado and elsewhere, CCDEH and many others, we created regulations for MEHKOs that was appropriate for their scale. MEHKOs are inspected, permitted and safe. We sometimes hear from restaurants that the lesser inspection of MEHKOs is suspect to them, but they ignore the difference in scale and the guardrails keeping MEHKOs to that scale. They would not like to be regulated like industrial facilities or slaughterhouses and certainly don't have to be.

We do not view MEHKOs as significant competition for restaurants. As I said, we support restaurants, especially those which are independent and supporting their local economy. MEHKOs will not generally compete for the same trade. They are hyper-local, often open only a few nights per week, have very simple, often very special menus and can accommodate only so many people per evening. Some MEHKOs will be run by stay-at-home parents or caretakers, who would like to make money supporting their families, while not spending money on strangers to care for their charges. Other MEHKOs are trying out concepts, which might lead to them opening a brick-and-mortar restaurant at some point. We have heard many stories of restaurants who have started out in some fashion like this before opening their own restaurant, a proposition which is daunting due to its cost. They tell us, often sheepishly, that they were not legal, because there are few easy options short of building a restaurant which are. Renting a commercial kitchen is not as easy as some people think. We think that it is a very good idea to give people a path toward opening a restaurant which is legal,

which is permitted from the start, which gives them good regulatory feedback as they grow and which is affordable from the beginning.

Restaurants do seem to misunderstand their competition too. They should be more worried about take out from permitted restaurants, especially those operating out of '*ghost kitchens*.' Of course, perhaps they are concerned about this too, but have no idea what to do about it because it is legal. We are working to create stories which will encourage people to buy their food from people they know, rather than anonymous sources.

Recently we've been hearing more and more about nuisance issues from neighbors and cities. We understand this is a concern, but we feel the analysis has been incorrect, that fear has overshadowed reality. Unpermitted home cooks have caused some nuisance, as have other home businesses and other businesses. This is a reality of life and one cities have to be prepared to deal with. As for unpermitted home businesses, they are run either by people who don't care about permits or people who would like one but can't get one. The former perhaps don't care about being nuisances. The latter often care, but not having gone through a permitting process and receiving education, perhaps aren't aware of all the ways they can be a nuisance. Education is key. We, along with the UC Cooperative Extension, SBDC, Internet platforms and others, offer education to MEHKOs that includes best practices for being a good neighbor while running your business. Many would-be MEHKOs will not operate without a permit, not wanting to break any law, including nuisance laws. They will be mostly good citizens once permitted and educated, as we have seen in counties where the law has been adopted. There have been few complaints against permitted MEHKOs, the few of which we heard of were quickly remedied. As such, we expect code enforcement efforts to be lessened, if slightly, with passage of the law, with a decrease of unpermitted cooks who may not behave well and an increase of permitted cooks, who will generally behave well. Without the passage of the law, the county will bias the field toward the unpermitted cooks and continue problems at about the same level as now.

We know that adoption of AB 626 will help a local economy, putting people who want to work legally to work, especially now as we try to recover from the pandemic-induced recession, will give access to food, especially for populations what have had difficulty accessing it during the recession, such as seniors, will strengthen the local economy, creating resilience by diversifying and localizing business, creating businesses which are nimble enough to survive pandemics and recessions, and will create community by letting people know where there food comes from and who made it. We applaud the County of Santa Barbara for being among the leaders in the movement to legalize the sale of homemade food.

Thank you,

Peter

Peter Ruddock
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California Policy & Implementation Director, [COOK Alliance](#) [FB]