

Riverside County Department of Environmental Health – Making Food Back Home With MHKO

OVERVIEW

Riverside County Department of Environmental Health was the first government agency to implement the Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operation (MHKO) program in the State of California.

CHALLENGE

In January 2019, Assembly Bill 626 took effect in California, which amended California's health and safety code establishing a new type of retail food facility. This new bill provides a unique opportunity as it allows individuals to operate restaurants at their private residences. However, it led to many challenges in the environmental health community because the responsible regulatory agencies did not yet have a program in place to address home-based restaurants.

SOLUTION

The innovative steps our department took to solve the challenge of developing and incorporating the new educational needs for MHKO food facility owners and operators and our inspectors were as follows:

- Created a committee comprised of a program chief (manager), area supervisors, and senior inspectors who could develop and implement a program for MHKO.
- Prepared a potential impact [report](#) on sidewalk vendors and MHKOs that was presented to the Riverside County Board of Supervisors by our deputy director.
- Developed an ordinance that would allow and outline how a MHKO can operate within our jurisdiction. This was done with the passing of Riverside County [Ordinance no. 949](#) on May 7, 2019. Ordinance 949 covered important definitions, operating and permit requirements, our inspection process and of course legal consequences like civil actions, costs and damages.
- Conducted outreach to all our incorporated cities, several town hall meetings, Board of Supervisor meetings, and community events to provide [information](#) to the public.
- Trained our inspectors on how to inspect a MHKO by developing a power point training course for all our inspectors and potential operators.

- Created a website information page dedicated to the MHKO program.
<https://rivcoeh.org/OurServices/Foods/MicroenterpriseHomeKitchenOperations>
- Trained designated staff to answer questions from the newly regulated community.
- Created an inspection report and [guide](#) for operators and inspectors.
- Rolled out a social media educational campaign for the program through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. <https://www.facebook.com/RiversideCountyEH/videos/957290031340824/>
- Contacted traditional media outlets leading to print, television, and radio interviews in both English and Spanish.

INNOVATION

The Riverside County Department of Environmental Health showed initiative as the first county in the state of California to successfully implement the MHKO Program. All our training, information and implementation was original, and has paved a path for other government agencies to follow.

RESULTS

Our program has successfully created clear guidelines for program implementation. There are currently 72 permitted MHKO businesses in Riverside county. All 72 have passed their inspections without a single case of food borne illness reported. This program allows residents who normally could not afford to open a traditional food facility an affordable option to make and sell food from their homes while also helping to connect and strengthen relationships with people from their communities as seen in the award-winning documentary of real MHKOs in Riverside County.

<https://vimeo.com/377415563>

REPLICABILITY

With the resources we have created, our MHKO program can easily be replicated. In fact, we have provided information and guidance to multiple government agencies including Imperial County, San Bernardino County, Santa Barbara County, Monterey County, Stanislaus County, Fresno County, and the City of Berkeley who all requested our help with the implementation of this program.

PROGRAM CONTACT

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