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# Community Food Incubation and the Potential to Create Small Food Businesses in New Brunswick

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## Introduction

New Brunswick is home to many current and future food business entrepreneurs. Some are home cooks who would like to start a food business. Others would like to expand their current businesses by selling from a food cart, food truck, or restaurant. Some cooks produce one well developed product such as tamales, pasteles, or empanadas and others cook meals or a variety of products. Many communities are creating food entrepreneurship programs to support cooks like these with the aim of spurring community economic development. Many of these cooks in New Brunswick are low-income and to grow their businesses, need access to low-cost commercial kitchen space, business support and training, insurance, food safety training and certification, and start-up assistance among other things. Having access to certified commercial kitchen space is essential because food business entrepreneurs in New Jersey have to make food in certified commercial kitchens. The 2016 New Brunswick Food Assessment found that there is demand for commercial kitchen space especially in the early morning hours, that cooks may need space to store ingredients and equipment, that many need freezer and refrigeration space, and that most can spend no more than twenty to one hundred dollars per week to rent space (New Brunswick Community Food Assessment, 2016).

The New Brunswick Community Food Alliance, a coalition of organizations and residents interested in improving community food security, is interested in growing small food businesses. Its Food Economic Development Work Group asked the Ralph W. Voorhees Public Service Fellows to research community food incubators to learn more about what it takes to create and grow existing small food businesses. The Voorhees Fellows are a group of five undergraduate students who conduct community based research each Fall. To research the Food Alliance's question, we asked:

- (1) What are community food incubators?**
- (2) How do incubators support small food business development in their communities?**
- (3) What community food incubator-type resources already exist in New Brunswick?**

To answer these questions, we researched food incubators in the US. We reviewed the incubators to identify services that would address the needs of New Brunswick entrepreneurs. To compare them we looked at thirty-eight incubators and created a detailed

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table that outlined the breadth of services each incubator provides. We distinguished between community kitchens and food incubators as community kitchens, we found, often provide a commercial kitchen space in which to work but offer few services. In contrast, food incubators provide a range of business services and may provide a space to cook but they often serve formally trained chefs and better resourced small businesses. From these thirty-eight incubators, we narrowed down our list to 20 that we felt served people who have low incomes.

To better understand the existing infrastructure for small food business training in and around New Brunswick, we spoke with and or heard presentations from seven people who are affiliated with these types of programs. We also reviewed academic and practitioner literature. Finally, we used visuals to illustrate many topics including many from Wodka's (2016) study *U.S. Kitchen Incubators: An Industry Update*, which is the most current study of food incubators. The research included a fifty-four-question survey sent to 250 US shared-use food facilities. The survey received sixty-one responses, resulting in a 24% response rate. While limitations to this study include limited generalizability and sampling and response bias, we believe that the data presented is valuable and presents similar findings to our own research.



Our report identifies and describes community food incubator practices that are common to organizations nationally, how and in what ways incubators combine physical kitchen space and business services, and suggests what is needed to create an incubator in New Brunswick. Our research suggests that to create or grow existing small food businesses, food entrepreneurs need a number of key components. Physical commercial kitchen space is the most basic element and is where products are made. Office space is typically used for marketing and other business tasks. Ingredient sourcing helps entrepreneurs find high quality, low cost ingredients. Business services are important to get the word out to make a

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profit and include business planning, branding and marketing, and financial literacy education. To make the incubator a reality, networking, cooking classes/lessons, and food development and testing are necessary components.

This report includes an overview of the important parts of a food business incubator. First, we explore the facilities needed to create the incubator including a commercial kitchen and office space. Next, we discuss overall business services. Last, we describe services specific to food businesses.

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# Food Incubator Facilities and Services

## Facilities

The incubator facilities are the first major element of an incubator we will discuss. Most incubators we looked at operate a shared commercial kitchen space and some incubators also provide office space for participants.

## Kitchens

The purpose of this section is to describe the necessary components of the physical kitchen space. A kitchen used to produce food for sale needs to be certified for commercial production which means that small food businesses need certified places to cook. Most incubators provide on-site commercial kitchens. Others including Detroit Kitchen CConnect and University of Wisconsin Food Business Incubation Network refer clients to a network of



kitchens. The kitchens must meet state and local health and safety codes. Chapter twenty-four of the New Jersey Administrative Code identifies the requirements for NJ commercial kitchens (New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services). Using a shared commercial kitchen

allows cost reduction and maximization of kitchen use throughout the day. The following subsections describe different elements of the kitchen space and logistics.

## Kitchen Equipment

Entrepreneurs need access to the proper cooking equipment. The appliances incubators provide vary and depend on user needs. Some incubators allow participants to bring their

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own, specialized equipment. To demonstrate the typical equipment provided, U.S. Kitchen Incubators: An Industry Update reports that 95% of the kitchens surveyed have convection ovens, 93% have prep tables, and 88% have a mixer (Wodka, 2016: p.8).

## Storage Space

Storing the ingredients used in their products can be a major challenge. Storage space is important for entrepreneurs who have nowhere to keep their supplies or would have a difficult time with transportation. Space can be organized for dry, cold/wet, and frozen storage. The amount of storage space, price, and security varies by incubator. The timeframe for storage use is a consideration as well. In the US a majority of incubators provide storage space (Wodka, 2016).



## Examples

Margaret Brennan from the Rutgers Food Innovation Center (RFIC) reports that “you can never have enough storage” (Brennan, 2016). Some kitchens facilitate ingredient deliveries with loading docks. The RFIC facility maintains a storage area which allows producers to store ingredients between production runs. The Starting Block incubator in Hart, Michigan, charges \$10/month for “non secured dry pallet storage,” \$1.50/cubic foot/month in either freezer or cooler storage, or \$8/month to rent a locking cabinet.

## Cost for Rental

Incubators use various strategies to decide how to charge for kitchen use. Kitchen rental costs can range from hourly to monthly pricing. This cost may include storage space. Rental costs can be subsidized with outside funding. A sliding rental scale varies prices to benefit low-income participants or participants that use the kitchen for more hours/week. Other kitchens have membership fees and/or require security deposits.

## Examples

The Livingston Food Resource Center incubator in Livingston, MT, charges \$12/hour for new entrepreneurs and \$15/hour for established entrepreneurs (Livingston Food Resource Center). The Starting Block targets low-income entrepreneurs and charges \$15/hour for kitchen use (The Starting Block). Both incubators have low rental costs in comparison

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with incubators serving different demographics. At Union Kitchen in D.C. monthly prices range from \$1,095 to \$4,000/month (Union Kitchen). This reflects the mission of some incubators to serve low-income and/or newer entrepreneurs.

## Cleaning

Cleaning remains one of the greatest challenges for incubators (Wodka, 2016). It can be unclear how to organize cleaning an incubator kitchen. Cleaning must satisfy county health code and can be the responsibility of the kitchen owners or renters. Cleaning kitchen utensils, countertops, and floors is the responsibility of the kitchen renter in almost all incubators. The cost of cleaning can be included in the incubator's hourly rental price or a separate cleaning fee. If appliances need repairing, either the entrepreneurs or the incubators will hold responsibility for arranging and paying for the repairs. Responsibility for waste removal varies between incubators.

## Examples

La Dorita Kitchen Share, a nonprofit food incubator in Sharpsburg, PA, charges users a monthly membership fee for cleaning (La Dorita Kitchen Share). Forage Kitchen, an incubator kitchen in San Francisco, has dish-washing staff and offers recycling and composting for waste. Hummingbird Kitchen in Eugene OR and Grow Benzie in Benzonia, MI have kitchen operating manuals online that go into detail about cleaning and maintenance responsibilities (Stellaria Building) (Grow Benzie Kitchen).

## Staff

Many of the logistical challenges incubators face could be resolved with more staff. Onsite staff can perform a variety of functions from dishwashing, providing cooking assistance, letting participants into the building, and dealing with equipment issues. Having staff in the kitchen ensures safety and proper use of equipment.

## New Brunswick

Access to a kitchen in New Brunswick could look like a stand-alone commercial kitchen or a network of underutilized kitchens in the city. Elijah's Promise has two commercial kitchens and the Unity Square has one. The New Brunswick Community Food Alliance (NBCFA) previously created an inventory of all commercial kitchens, including church, school, and fire house kitchens. The supplies, equipment, storage, and hours of availability

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for each facility varies. For example, Elijah’s Promise uses their kitchens for many programs and the kitchens are only sparingly available for rental throughout the week. And some organizations that have commercial kitchens are likely not interested in using their space for food incubation. The many disconnected spaces lend toward a network setup where entrepreneurs are connected with the kitchen that best fits their needs. In a network setup, all of the items described in the “Kitchen” section would need to be carefully considered and coordinated for each kitchen in the network.

## **Office Space**

Some incubators include office space that they use for themselves or open up to their entrepreneurs. This space may be used for marketing, making advertising materials or labels, storing business materials, training, meetings, and events. Incubators typically provide equipment such as copy machines, computers, internet access, phones, meeting rooms, and desks. Entrepreneurs may be charged for office space as a part of rent or as an additional cost.

## **Examples**

Union Kitchen DC’s main location has office and conference space where the founders work and manage the incubator (Jacob, 2015). Starting Block in Hart, Michigan provides office space for rent with “computer and internet access, phone and office support” (The Starting Block).

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## Services

Incubators offer a wide range of general business and food business services, both of which are vital to incubator participants' success. In the following section, we discuss which ones are most important in the early stages of business development.

### Business Services

Incubators provide a variety of services, such as financial literacy education, accessing funds, business planning, and branding and marketing assistance. We start with financial literacy education.

### Financial Literacy Education

Some incubators provide financial literacy training to teach aspiring entrepreneurs how to manage, earn, and invest money, personal skills that are important for planning and running a successful business. Financial literacy education could strengthen New Brunswick's entrepreneurs' business and personal capacity.

### Examples

El Pajaro Community Development Corporation in Watsonville, California provides three-hour financial literacy workshops to community members and incubator participants. The workshops teach participants how to track personal expenses and save, use checking and savings accounts, and obtain credit.

### New Brunswick

The Piscataway Public Library received a "Smart Investing @Your Library" grant to hold financial literacy workshops on financial check-up, retirement, and investment. They offer these classes at the New Brunswick Public Library and as evening webinars. The library also offers "lunch and learn," financial literacy workshops for businesses.

Rutgers could extend its existing financial literacy courses to non-students and or engage student volunteers to teach financial literacy courses to residents. The semester-long courses include Personal Finance and Financial Decision-making, and Finance for Personal and Professional Success. Additionally, the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station offers online financial literacy resources including programs, assessment tools, a consumer-to-consumer video series, financial education lesson plans, Microsoft Excel financial templates, a

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financial guide for women, savings challenges, and other resources (New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station ).

The Intersect Fund also provides some one-on-one financial literacy coaching, including to entrepreneurs who do not qualify for a loan (De La Hoz, 2016). This service is described in more detail in the “Access to Funding” section below.

## **Access to Funding**

Connecting entrepreneurs to funding sources is critical to ensuring they can use the skills they learn to grow their businesses. Accessing funds is a vital step for entrepreneurs in building their food businesses. While many New Brunswick entrepreneurs are not interested in owning restaurants, start-up costs for food trucks, consistent vending, and product development can still be high (New Brunswick Community Food Assessment). As 35% of the New Brunswick population falls below the poverty line many individuals looking to start a food business may lack start up funds (American Community Service, 2010-14).

## **Examples**

Incubators often provide assistance to access funding. La Cocina provides free loan and financing assistance for small businesses in the San Francisco community (La Cocina). Hot Bread Kitchen in New York, NY also provides one-on-one coaching to small businesses to grow capital, and to established businesses to develop applications for larger loans (New York City Economic Development Corporation). Delaware State University’s Food Business Incubation Center offers loan support through its partnerships with technical business organizations. These partnerships include First State Community Loan Fund, a Delaware based nonprofit specializing in small business growth and development loans, including microloans (Delaware State University; First State Community Loan Fund).

## **New Brunswick**

The Intersect Fund is a local nonprofit that has been providing support to small businesses since 2009, helping low-income, minority, and women-owned businesses access microloans, business and technical assistance and build credit (Intersect Fund). Their loans range from \$100 to \$25,000 and average \$2,500, reflecting the need for small loans that exists in New Brunswick. If clients begin with poor credit or no credit history, the Intersect Fund’s credit building programs help clients understand the process and build their credit history to help them access loans in the future. These services are offered to entrepreneurs even if they

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are initially denied a loan (De La Hoz, 2016). This commitment to community is a cornerstone of The Intersect Fund's programming and one of the reasons they believe their loan loss rate is consistently so low (2.49% in 2012) (Intersect Fund).

Areas of New Brunswick have also been designated as Urban Enterprise Zones (UEZ) by the state. Businesses that participate in the UEZ program can receive benefits such as 50% sales tax reduction on retail sales, 100% sales tax reduction on purchases made, workforce training assistance and financial assistance from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (New Jersey Economic Development Authority) (NJ Dept. of Community Affairs). NJEDA's primary focus is on small businesses; perfect for the businesses created by entrepreneurs participating in a food incubator. NJEDA provides one-on-one counseling to help entrepreneurs find capital financing options and prepare loan packages, as well as providing loans, loan guarantees, and bond financing directly to small businesses (New Jersey Economic Development Authority; City of New Brunswick).

## **Business Planning**

An integral part of creating a food business incubator is to decide what business planning assistance to provide for aspiring entrepreneurs. Many successful food business incubators require potential entrepreneurs to develop a business plan before they use the incubator. Food business incubators help aspiring entrepreneurs develop business plans by providing business plan worksheets, food business development courses, and start-up consulting services. Developing a business plan allows entrepreneurs to see what is necessary to create a business and can help them to decide if a food business is right for them.

## **Examples**

El Pajaro Community Development Corporation in Watsonville, California operates a community kitchen that offers two types of business planning training for entrepreneurs. The first is a 3-hour evening seminar in which entrepreneurs learn the basic outline and components of a business plan and they create preliminary business plan outlines. The second is a "Business Plan in 4 Steps" course that meets for two and a half hours/week for four weeks. Participants create a detailed business plan that focuses on the feasibility of their business concept, marketing strategies, business organization and management, and financial management (to meet the requirements of investors and lenders).

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The Mixing Bowl in Albuquerque, New Mexico integrates business plan creation into the first steps of their Mixing Bowl Entrepreneur Development Program which guides participants through business plan review, assessment, and refinement.

### **New Brunswick**

The New Jersey Small Business Development Center (NJSBDC) at Rutgers University in Piscataway provides courses on business development. The Business Plan writing course teaches participants how to develop detailed business plans during a 20-hour workshop for \$125. Participants consider strategy and organization, marketing and research, forecasting and financial projections, and financial statements and budget projections. Participants receive training and instructional materials. After completing the course, aspiring entrepreneurs can receive post-training business plan consultation to edit their business plans (New Jersey Small Business Development Fund a). For those who want to plan ahead, a basic business plan outline is available for free download on the NJSBDC website (New Jersey Small Business Development Fund b).

While the Center is located in Piscataway, participants can travel from New Brunswick to the NJSBDC for free on the Rutgers Bus system. The Center also offers the business planning course in downtown New Brunswick through a partnership with Middlesex County Community College. The course is currently offered in English without translation. Given that a significant portion of the population speaks Spanish, the business planning course might not be accessible to some entrepreneurs.

### **Branding and Marketing Assistance**

Understanding how to market products is an important part of creating a successful food business. Because many new food entrepreneurs need assistance to market their products, food business incubators often provide resources to teach them how to make the best use of marketing tactics to appeal to the widest audience. Through classes and or individual consulting, aspiring entrepreneurs learn about market analysis, target markets, competitive advantage, product demand, social media outreach, design, and community advertising.

### **Examples**

There are multiple examples of how branding and marketing can be integrated as a resource within a food incubator. The Community Kitchen in Little Rock, Arkansas has an

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onsite business center where entrepreneurs can learn how to best market their product. Graphic artists at the center help entrepreneurs design logos, websites, and labels. La Cocina in San Francisco, California provides lists of websites, blogs and other resources to learn about branding and marketing online.

### **New Brunswick**

Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce offers a network of business opportunity, programming and visibility for fees ranging from \$295 per year for home based cooks up to \$10,000 a year for a business with 3,000 or more employees (Middlesex County Regional Chamber of Commerce). The Google Community Leaders Program of New Brunswick has a small business team that works with small businesses in New Brunswick to help them develop and implement a marketing plan. It also teaches business owners how to best use technology to promote their business (Google Community Leaders Program-New Brunswick).

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## Food Business Services

Creating a small food business includes specific challenges and many food business entrepreneurs need culinary assistance as well as basic business training. We discuss food business services in the next section.

## Ingredient Sourcing

For some entrepreneurs, getting high quality low-cost raw ingredients is a priority. Ingredient sourcing can help kitchen participants find suppliers that have healthy products. Ingredient sourcing can support local agriculture, increase revenue, and support accurate food labeling. Incubators may link community gardens, farms and stores to food entrepreneurs so they can find ingredients for their product. This supports local economy and sustainability. For example, if there are extra tomatoes in a local garden and an entrepreneur is making red rice (a Mexican dish of rice soaked in tomatoes), the incubator can connect the two entities. While there are health regulations to keep in mind, for some incubators, ingredient sourcing may look like connecting a kitchen tenant with a local grocery store, community garden, a local farmer, or even community supported agriculture (CSA).

### Example

Quad Cities Food Hub in Iowa connects regional farmers to consumers. This type of connection increases environmental sustainability and community relationships (Quad Cities Food Hub).

### New Brunswick

The New Brunswick Community Garden Coalition links people to gardens for ingredient sourcing on a small scale. With support, facilitation, and an outlined plan, this could be expanded.

## Cooking Classes/Lessons

Many incubators offer cooking classes to expand participant knowledge and ability, generate revenue, and improve public health. Kitchens used for classes may feature glass walls for outside viewing, filming equipment, demonstration areas, multiple cooking stations, and or distance learning. Some incubators offer classes to the general public to

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subsidize operational costs. Classes offered can range from general cooking classes for adults to children’s healthy habits and nutrition classes, and technical trainings.

### **Examples**

Hope & Main in Warren, Rhode Island and Grand Rapids Downtown Market in Grand Rapids, Michigan both offer a broad range of fee-for-service classes that cost upwards of \$50 each (Hope & Main; Grand Rapids Downtown Market).

The nonprofit organization Create Common Good in Boise, Idaho offers a “Foundations” program which teaches skills for general kitchen and custodial jobs. A three-step food training program follows. The first step teaches participants basic culinary skills and participants receive a ServSafe food handler’s certificate. The second step increases hands-on learning and participants receive a ServSafe manager's certificate. The program’s third step concludes with 225 hours of paid work to enhance employability. These trainings are offered at modest prices to encourage the participation of low-income and under-employed populations (Create Common Good).

### **New Brunswick**

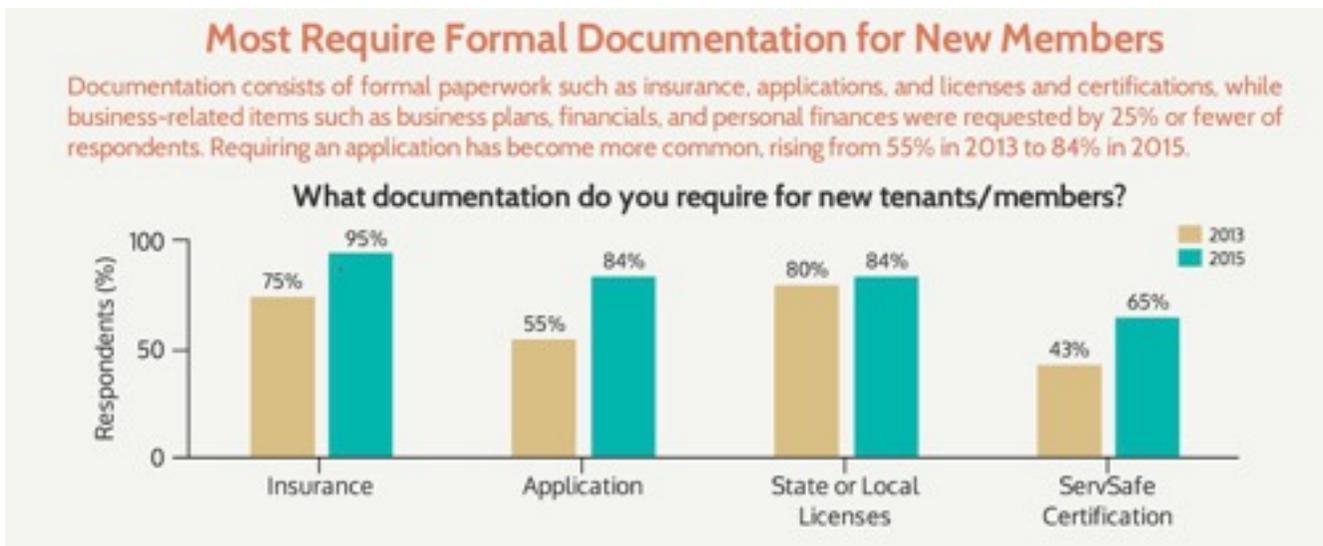
Elijah’s Promise’s Promise Culinary School provides state approved vocational culinary arts training. These courses include cooking basics and more advanced skills. The school serves low-income residents by linking them to financial assistance. Promise Culinary also offers a community-based “Let’s Cook” Program to improve nutrition and health for low-income families in New Brunswick. Residents learn hands-on cooking skills to make family-friendly healthy meals to enhance their diet. The program is free and emphasizes cooking with SNAP and WIC benefits and provides all ingredients (Elijah’s Promise). Elijah’s Promise could expand training for people with higher incomes to generate income to fund a community food incubator. The 2016 U.S. Kitchen Incubators: An Industry Update report found that nationally, approximately 10% of total revenue for food business incubators came from classes or trainings (Wodka, 2016).

### **Food Safety Certifications**

Food safety training and certification is necessary for people who work in the food industry. The certifications required for different food industry tasks and positions depends on state, county and local requirements. ServSafe certifications, the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation’s certification program, is recognized, trusted and the

most common. Some kitchens provide ServSafe classes at their sites; others refer people to outside training. While ServSafe is a commonly accepted certification, some municipalities require additional training and certification. Food business incubators have shown interest in ServSafe Certification for their participants in recent years, with ServSafe Certification jumping from a requirement for participants in only 43% of incubators in 2013 to 65% in 2015 (Wodka, 2016). This indicates that ServSafe could be an important service to provide for entrepreneurs in New Brunswick as they build skills and a reputation for their food business.

Figure 1, Incubator Documentation Requirements for New Participants



Source: Wodka, 2016

## Examples

Of the thirty-eight incubators we researched we found twenty-one provided some form of ServSafe certification training to their participants. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of the certifications offered. We found that many of the incubators that did not offer certification services required entrepreneurs to have ServSafe certifications to apply to use their facilities. We also found the Manager’s certification a much more common legal requirement across states, with the Food Handlers certification being voluntary, as is the case in New Jersey, thus making the Manager's certification a much more popular offering from incubators.

Figure 2, ServSafe Certifications Offered



Source: Voorhees Fellow Analysis of 21 Incubators

### New Brunswick

ServSafe certification requirements differ by state, county and locality. In Middlesex county, Food Handler certification (ServSafe or otherwise) is voluntary; it is required in nearby Somerset county. This Food Handler’s certificate is the first level of ServSafe certification and includes education on basic food safety, time and temperature control, and cleaning and sanitation. The next level, the Food Safety Manager ServSafe certification, is a state requirement for food businesses in NJ. The certification must be held by at least one individual per food establishment in NJ and covers “personal hygiene, foodborne illness, receiving, storing, preparing and serving foods; food safety regulations and more” (ServSafe). Both of these certification-associated courses and exams are offered in English and Spanish and are available in-person throughout NJ including at Middlesex County College and online from ServSafe.

Table 1. Certification Acquisition in Middlesex County

Program	Place	Cost	Notes
Food Handler's Certification	New Jersey Food Handlers	\$10	Free training in public schools, discounted training for volunteers, economic support upon request
Food Handler's Certification	Middlesex County Health Department	\$25	Limited Spanish availability Previously a weekday course
ServSafe Food Handler's Certification	Elijah's Promise (EJP)	\$150	Training exam all in one day. Cost includes lunch and refreshments
Food Handler's Course and Exam	Middlesex County College/ Online	\$15	Training and testing done in one day. Flexible scheduling for recertification.
Manager Course		\$125	Vouchers, study materials, textbooks, coursebooks, an exam sheets all must be purchased in addition to the cost of the exam.
Food Safety 101, ServSafe Food Handler's and ServSafe Manager Certification	Food Safety/Sanitation Consultants	Must Call for Fees	Training and examination same day. Recertification online with proctor.

Source: Voorhees Fellow's Analysis of 38 Incubators

## Food Development and Testing

Some food business incubators offer food related services including recipe development, menu design, tasting or testing rooms, and recipe standardization to assist with product development. And while most incubators market their kitchen as a “test kitchen” for businesses to develop new recipes, others expand on this basic service by offering professional guidance and or technical assistance with product development, including nutritional analysis and pH testing.

### Examples

Recipe development is offered by many incubators including low-income focused WHEDCo in the Bronx, NY, and El Pajaro Community Development Corporation in Watsonville, CA (WHEDCo; El Pajaro Community Development Corporation). The Starting Block in Hart, MI offers technical assistance including pH testing and recipe batching, where entrepreneurs learn to prepare ingredients for large scale production (The Starting Block). The Rutgers Food Innovation Center in Bridgeton, NJ offers advanced food development

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services for large-scale production including microbiological testing, proximate analysis of protein, fat, fiber, moisture, & ash, sensory testing including shelf life testing, commercial sample manufacturing, and assistance scaling up for pilot production (Rutgers Food Innovation Center).

### **New Brunswick**

The Food Innovation Center - North, a research center under the same direction as the RFIC in Bridgeton, is located in Piscataway, NJ and is accessible by car from New Brunswick. RFIC-North conducts consumer research for its food business clients and assists in scaling up production in a USDA and FDA approved facility (Rutgers Food Innovation Center-North).

Their Product Development Laboratory allows small businesses to produce product samples as they adjust their recipes and is available for rent on a daily or weekly basis. Their Quality Control Laboratory includes ingredient, packaging, and product testing equipment for product development and is also available for daily and weekly rental. Their Pilot Plant contains a range of equipment including a homogenizer, which can be



vital in product standardization at larger scales. RFIC-North has technicians to instruct and assist entrepreneurs and can be most useful as food business entrepreneurs mature (Rutgers Food Innovation Center-North).

Elijah's Promise is another possible resource for recipe development services since they have infrastructure that could be used to establish a recipe development service. Their office and teaching spaces at the Livingston Avenue location could be used for focus groups and taste testing. While Elijah's Promise does not have the ability to conduct laboratory testing or nutritional analysis, it would be a good starting point for local entrepreneurs to begin recipe standardization and development as they establish their food business.

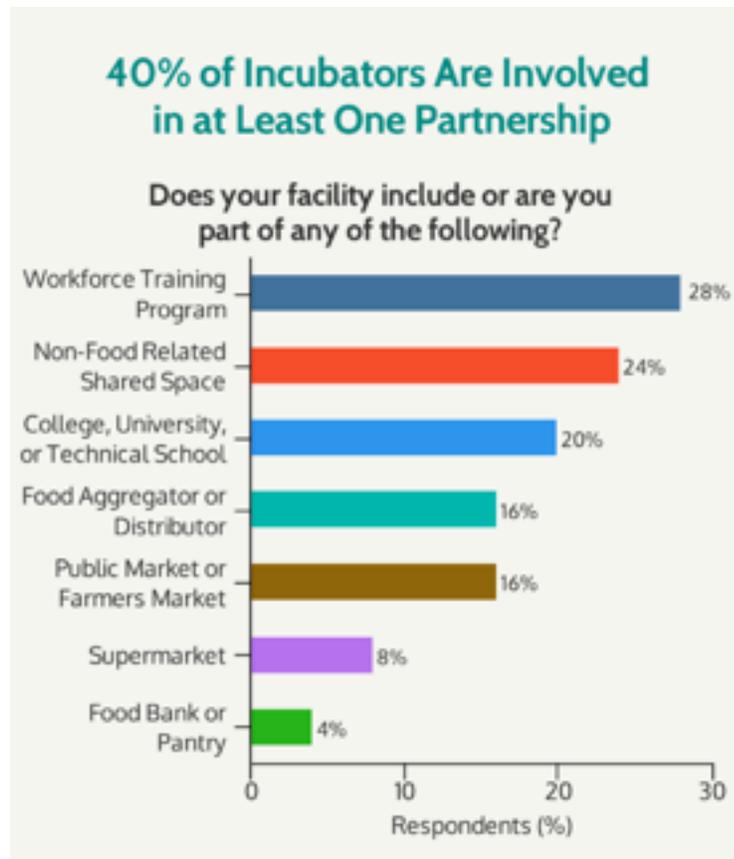
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## Creating Connections

The Incubator can benefit greatly from forming and maintaining intentional connections with individuals and the community. The connections the incubator makes have an influence on the services that can be provided.

### Partnerships

Figure 3, Incubator Partnerships



Source: Wodka, 2016

According to the U.S. Kitchen Incubator: An Industry Update report, “40% of Incubators are Involved in at Least One Partnership” (Wodka, 2016: 6). The incubator’s partnerships and connections will affect the participant entrepreneur. Connections to universities, county workforce training programs, food distributors, pantries and stores could provide more availability for space, funding for the incubator and an extension for the incubator’s participants to be connected more directly within their community.

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## Example

Many incubators are nonprofit organizations. Other incubators may have a private or public partnership. The Delaware State University Food Business Incubation Center “is managed by the Delaware Center for Enterprise Development in collaboration with the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management.” The staff “partners with the Delaware Health and Social Services Office of Food Protection” (Delaware State University). Additionally the incubator’s partnerships with local organizations like the Small Business Development Center and State of Delaware Office of Supplier Diversity allows participants to access technical support (Delaware State University).

## Memorandums of Understanding

Memorandums of Understanding are a set of rules or agreements that can outline the use of a kitchen. In a kitchen network incubator set-up, MOUs are extremely important for outlining the responsibilities of the incubator and of the kitchens and kitchen owners. MOUs for a networked kitchen incubator are extremely important because they outline differences in use of many kitchens.

MOUs can also exist between the kitchens and the participants. An MOU can outline liability requirements, cost for rental, cleaning responsibility, scheduling information, cancelling a reservation, licensing information, insurance, and access to facilities.

## Example

Flint Food Works offers their operating procedures manual and example on their website. Their example manual includes items like hand washing, cooling and reheating products, cleaning equipment, restrooms, health policy, and purchasing food (Flint Food Works). Kitchen Commons, a community kitchen network provides a sample MoU that outlines services and responsibilities of the entrepreneur and the host kitchen that covers the insurance, licenses and certifications required, inspection of facilities and storage (Kitchen Commons).

## New Brunswick

In New Brunswick, Elijah’s Promise may be able to provide sample MoUs or agreements they require for use of their kitchen space.

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## User Interface

Where can the average person learn about the incubator? Where do entrepreneurs book their kitchen space? An interface, most likely a website that is also mobile-friendly, can support the incubator's publicity. Having an accessible resource outlining what businesses the incubator is incubating and where to get their product as well as upcoming cooking classes or markets for revenue generation supports the function and revenue generation for the incubator and participants. A user interface would allow for all the resources of a networked kitchen incubator to be displayed and accessed in one place. The user interface could also offer easy-to-use scheduling for incubator participants only. Accessibility to a user interface includes language accessibility for all resources and accurate updated information.

One paradigm for presenting the physical network (kitchens, financial resources, vending spaces and office spaces) is a Google My Map. My Map allows all these points to be plotted with description information attached to each location. This type of interface also allows participants to maximize their time by locating resources closest to them, viewing what public transit lines are available to resources.

## Retail Connections

It may be appropriate for incubators to provide places for entrepreneurs to sell their product(s). Residents indicated the need for connections to low-barrier vending opportunities (New Brunswick Community Food Assessment). Entrepreneurs may want to sell their products in a variety of places including at markets, festivals, bodegas, supermarkets, and restaurants. Barriers can include consistency of vending site, linguistic differences, distance to the vending site, licensing and paperwork for legal sale at certain sites, cost of application to sell at sites, and social acceptance into a space (Bergman, October 2016).

## Examples

Hope and Main and Downtown Market Grand Rapids operate food markets with multiple vendors in addition to their incubator business services and kitchen spaces. Spice Kitchen also connects participants to market spaces and leverages their own brand to support the success of their incubating businesses. Lastly, Flint Food Works' incubator is in connection with the Flint Farmers Market offering connection to year round vending opportunities for their participants. Vendors may or may not be participants in the incubator program, but the market space is a vending option for participants.

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## **New Brunswick**

The New Brunswick Community Farmers Market is an existing space where local and small businesses are encouraged to sell their products.

### **Alumni Networks and Resources**

Alumni networks provide a network of support to participants and/or graduates of food business incubation programs. In today's increasingly globalized economy, having connections to other businesses and individuals can significantly increase a business' success. Alumni can serve as mentors to guide graduates through the process of starting a career in small food business, giving advice about job openings, potential clients, unexpected challenges, and more. The Alumni Network can also be an entity where members market and support each other's businesses.

### **Example**

La Cocina in San Francisco, California has both an alumni and graduate network. Their alumni network includes individuals who were not able to complete their program, but performed at a high level during their participation, continue to contribute to the community, or found success in the food industry. Their graduate network is comprised of individuals who successfully completed their food incubator program, reaching all established benchmarks to expand their business beyond La Cocina's kitchen. Both of these groups help La Cocina's recent participants and graduates attain another level of business success.

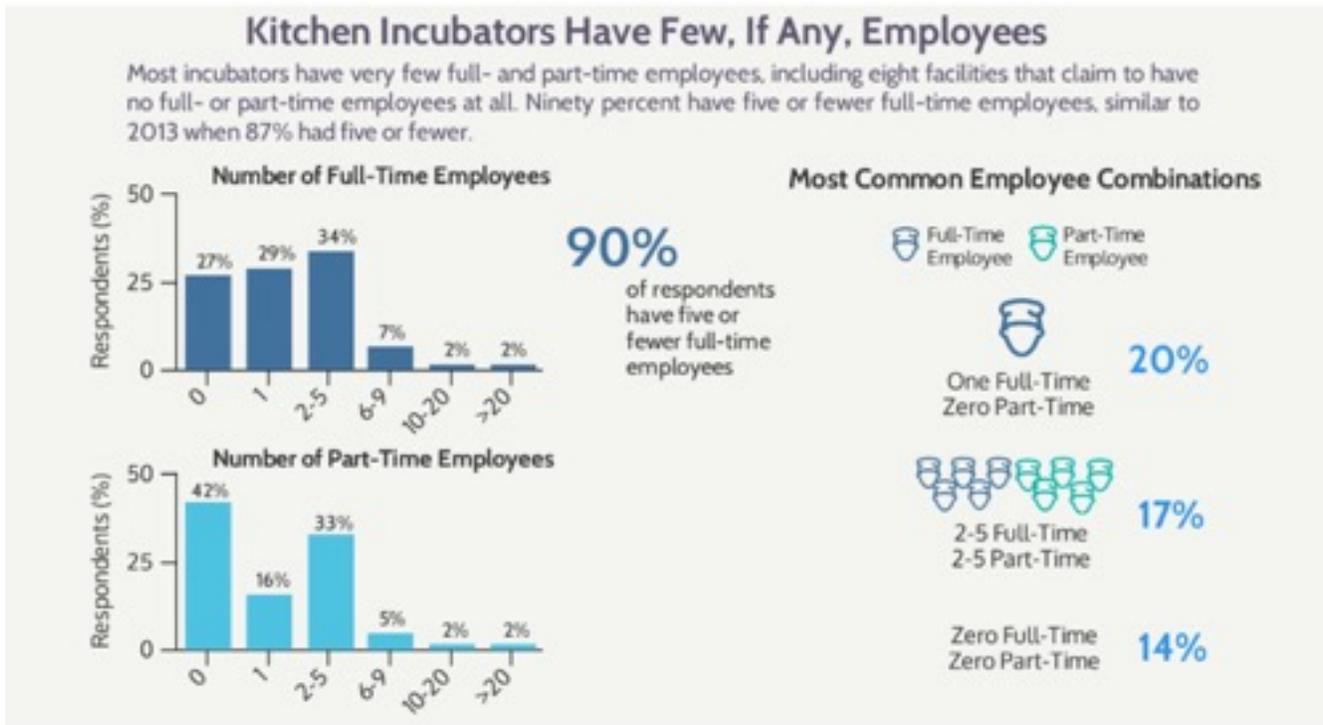
## **New Brunswick**

Elijah's Promise has over 800 graduates from its culinary school program and has created an alumni network that enables these graduates to share information pertinent to best business practices and job opportunities with each other.

### **Facilitating Components of an Incubator**

There are multiple aspects of managing a sustainable incubator network. It will take dedicated effort to organize and facilitate the process of creating a comprehensive kitchen-based incubator or a networked incubator in New Brunswick. The incubator's initiation and continued facilitation will require designated staff. According to U.S. Kitchen Incubator: An Industry Update 74% of kitchen incubators have at least one full-time employee dedicated to maintaining the incubator's functions and 58% have at least one part-time employee.

Figure 4, Kitchen Incubator Employees



Source: Wodka, 2016

Employee(s) would be responsible for maintaining the connections to all the network partners and coordinating their services. Employees would support and guide the movement of the entrepreneur through the incubation process. Responsibilities would also include maintaining the MOUs and knowing New Brunswick. Without a designated catalyst for the components of an incubator, the incubator may not function efficiently.

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## Conclusion

Our semester of research and conversations with key actors working on New Brunswick food security has been truly inspiring. We learned about some incredible food incubators and community kitchens in the US working to serve food entrepreneurs and focusing on key demographics including women, immigrants, refugees, and low-income communities. They provide a wide range of services to participants that allow these small, local businesses to succeed and grow. Then we found that within New Brunswick there are many organizations already providing these services, from university entities to nonprofits to public organizations. It is clear that the capacity, passion, and motivation to make a food incubator a reality already exist in New Brunswick and we look forward to watching the work of the New Brunswick Community Food Alliance, Elijah's Promise, and the many other collaborating organizations develop over the years to come.

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## Appendix A. Incubators

### **A Community Kitchen, Little Rock, Arkansas**

A Community Kitchen is a fully equipped and commercially licensed commercial kitchen in Little Rock, Arkansas. The kitchen supports entrepreneurs through its business center. Some of the resources include: connections with local packagers and producers, a graphic artist who helps entrepreneurs with logo designs, websites and labels, reference to legal counsel, and referral to insurance agents for food businesses (A Community Kitchen, Little Rock).

### **Create Common Good, Boise, ID**

Create Common Good in Boise, ID describes itself as a nonprofit social enterprise with the goal of helping adults with barriers to employment become self-sufficient through food service training and job placement assistance programs. The individuals they serve include those exiting the prison system, survivors of domestic violence, immigrants, refugees, and those leaving substance use disorder programs. They match the talents of those involved in their training programs with the needs of the surrounding community to create genuine partnerships that benefit all parties involved. They have developed a model of sustainability based on their paid food production services and products that help subsidize their food service training programs and generate revenue to keep the nonprofit afloat. In addition to these services which are targeted at restaurants and food producers, they also hold Supperclub meals and Cooking Classes for the public throughout the year; with premium ticket prices these events serve as both fundraisers for the organization and showcase the skills participants learn through their programs. Overall they aim to create a model of empowerment that could be used to reach similar goals in any community around the world, and seek to make their programs and successes replicable for other organizations (Create Common Good).

### **Delaware State University Food Business Incubation Center**

Delaware State University (DSU) Food Business Incubation Center (FBIC) is on the Delaware University Campus. The center provides a shared use commercial kitchen and client support through local partnerships. The DSU FBIC also offers flexible hours and discounted rates for use of their facility. Clients can produce food products and can be connected to ServSafe training, technical and business development through local business

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centers and funding sources. Clients apply to the FBIC and commit to agreements regarding the use of the kitchen (pdf of application and client agreements can be found on their website) (Delaware State University).

### **Detroit Kitchen Connect (DKC), Detroit, MI**

Detroit Kitchen Connect (DKC) is a nonprofit collaboration between Detroit's Eastern Market and FoodLab Detroit that connects participants to a network of commercial kitchens. The organization's mission is to support the diverse food entrepreneurs in the city. A vibrant local agriculture and food scene emerged in the wake of disinvestment and DKC supports local entrepreneurs that face financial difficulties getting their food businesses off the ground. Foodlab Detroit provides business support to local food entrepreneurs and Eastern Market is an accessible vending opportunity for those who use a DKC kitchen. Between the three networked organizations, the entrepreneurs have access to almost every imaginable assistance for their businesses. Some unique offerings include a collaboration with Detroit urban farmers for local ingredient sourcing (called "Detroit Grown and Made") and access to a network of commercial kitchens in the city and metro area (Detroit Kitchen Connect).

### **El Pajaro Community Development Corporation, Watsonville, CA**

El Pájaro Community Development Corporation, in Watsonville, California, provides small business development services for low-income minority entrepreneurs that includes bilingual business training and consulting for aspiring entrepreneurs. The organization's Kitchen Incubator includes a low rental cost commercial kitchen. The Kitchen Incubator also helps participants attain licensing and business support (El Pajaro Community Development Corporation).

### **Elijah's Promise, New Brunswick, NJ**

Elijah's Promise in New Jersey began as a soup kitchen founded by three local churches in 1989, expanded to include a culinary arts training program in 1997, a catering business in 1999, and a baking and pastry program in 2010. Their nonprofit is rooted in the idea that food can change lives and they believe in harnessing this power to break the cycle of poverty and alleviate hunger in their community. Other core values of Elijah's Promise include creating social good through businesses, providing dignity and honor to the individuals they serve, and promoting healthy and sustainable food. While they do not formally identify as a food business incubator, they provide job training and education

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programs similar to a traditional incubator and rent their teaching kitchen to local food businesses, such as coffee roasters, pickled foods, baked goods, catering businesses, and traditional Oaxacan food items. These include their Promise Culinary School and Promise Catering social enterprise, both focused on serving low-income and food insecure populations. The Promise Culinary School offers vocational programs in Culinary Arts and Baking & Pastry Arts which include skills training, externships in the local community, personal development/life skills, and job placement assistance. Students can receive credit for their Promise Culinary training through partnerships local (Middlesex Community College) and national (Johnson & Wales University) educational institutions. Promise Catering employs students and graduates of their culinary school program and provides meals to schools, daycares, and community based organizations including Meals on Wheels in Greater New Brunswick which serves the local homebound elderly population. In addition to their educational and job training program they also serve the local community through their community soup kitchen, comprehensive social services, and community garden (Elijah's Promise).

### **Flint Food Works, Flint MI**

Flint Food Works partnered with Ruth Mott Foundation and Innovation Incubator among other organizations, has a mission to support food entrepreneurs from creating and perfecting their food and business all the way to marketing and selling their food. They offer commercial kitchen space and business development. Participants must apply, be interviewed and if accepted go through an online orientation. Applicants must be a legally recognized business within their state, have ServSafe Food Manager's certification and liability insurance. Flint Food Works offers their operations manual example on their website along with resources for funding food businesses, a food labelling guide and a guide to start small business. Flint Food Works also operates market space that they connect their participants to the Flint Farmers Market hosting year round vendors and vending opportunities (Flint Food Works).

### **ForageSF, San Francisco, CA**

The ForageSF incubator kitchen is a fully equipped commercial kitchen in San Francisco that even provides dishwashing staff. ForageSF is a nonprofit that started out supporting wild food foragers and expanded into three projects: "The Underground Market" food market that is no longer running, the "Wild Kitchen" underground supper club and the

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Forage Kitchen. The kitchen serves both “chefs and chefs at heart” and has different membership levels. Professional chefs get the best hourly rates and the full suite of services and recreational cooks pay slightly more. Forage is unique in all the onsite services offered including the aforementioned dishwashing, composting and recycling of food waste, office space, and a cafe where entrepreneurs can sell their products. The incubator also offers classes and mentors to help with the business side (ForageSF).

### **Grand Rapids Downtown Market, Grand Rapids, MI**

Grand Rapids Downtown Market, Inc. in Michigan is a mixed-use facility that includes a market hall with commercial and restaurant spaces, a rooftop greenhouse, classes and events, private rentals and leasing, and a incubator kitchen. The incubator builds upon the area’s existing food movement by providing an inclusive space and community for entrepreneurs looking to start and grow food businesses. Their commercial kitchens and associated spaces are available 24/7 and provide equipment to assist entrepreneurs in food production, pastry production, packaging including labeling, prepping, and catering. They also advertise “practical business tools” and “technical assistance” for their entrepreneurs. Their developed food businesses are primarily artisanal products such as specialty cupcakes, cold brew coffee, craft brew brownies, naturally flavored shaved ice, artisanal sausage, organic kombucha, gourmet meat rubs and “vegan meats” (Grand Rapids Downtown Market).

### **Hope & Main, Warren, RI**

Hope & Main is Rhode Island’s first culinary business incubator. It helps the local food community by creating a community of support where entrepreneurs can develop and grow their businesses. Hope & Main, a nonprofit incubator, includes a market, community garden and event and workshop space. It focuses on growing businesses that are in their first two-to-three years of operation and assists entrepreneurs through a combination of “below market-rate” rentals of health-code-compliant commercial kitchen and storage spaces and extensive business service support programs (Hope & Main). These services include shipping, receiving, labeling and packaging facilities, cooperative purchasing, business model development, customer and distribution assistance and mentorship programs. All of this is included in a monthly fee that is based on kitchen use and storage space (which includes overhead costs associated with the space, such as trash collection, cleaning, and utilities). They have helped a variety of small food businesses to grow including personal chefs, food

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trucks, and artisanal bakers and provide continued support to dozens of food businesses (Hope & Main).

### **Hot Bread Kitchen, New York, NY**

Hot Bread Kitchen (HBK) is a nonprofit social enterprise that includes a bakery, job-training program, and food business incubator based out of Manhattan, NY. In 2007, Hot Bread Kitchen began operating their Bakers in Training program for women facing economic insecurity out of their founder Jessamyn's home kitchen. By 2010, they had moved into La Marqueta, an indoor market in East Harlem, where they sold the bread that the women in their training programs had baked. It was here that they were selected by the New York City Council and Economic Development Corporation to run an incubator out of the market. This led to the creation of HBK Incubates in 2011, based on Hot Bread Kitchen's own start-up success. This incubator uses a four pronged approach to help entrepreneurs succeed in building their small food businesses. HBK Incubates four major focuses are commercial kitchen access, business development support, culinary community, and market access. Based off of these core components, HBK Incubates provides 24/7 access to a 3,000 sq. ft. fully equipped kitchen, workshops and educational resources, an on-staff business advisor, alumni events, entrepreneur exchanges, and access to catering opportunities and retailers, among other programming (Hot Bread Kitchen).

### **Kitchen Commons, Portland, OR**

Kitchen Commons is a non profit with a mindset for food justice that connects a network of community kitchens. Kitchen Commons partners with a local University as well as foundations like Charitable Partnership Fund and MRG Foundation for funding. Their model of a kitchen network includes a directory of partner kitchens and a kitchen resource guide. They offer a leadership training program that teaches people how to start and sustain community kitchens. Moreover, they provide connections to a resource network for idea exploration and collaboration (Kitchen Commons).

### **La Dorita, Sharpsburg, PA**

La Dorita is a Pittsburgh company that produces Dulce de Leche and was started by Argentine immigrants. Inspired by their business startup process, the family started the Kitchen Share, a nonprofit commercial kitchen and incubator program. The program serves low-income entrepreneurs with a focus on women and immigrants. While it is competitive to

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get access to La Dorita’s comprehensive business incubation process, which includes access to the kitchen as well as “up to \$70,000 worth of free incubation and coaching services,” the website also provides some free basic resources such as a product pricing tool and a guide to starting a food business in Allegheny County (La Dorita).

### **La Cocina, San Francisco, CA**

La Cocina is a nonprofit food business incubator located in San Francisco, California whose mission is to help low-income food entrepreneurs grow their businesses through access to affordable commercial kitchen space, business and technical assistance and connections to distribution opportunities. They aim to make their entrepreneurs financially secure and independent while simultaneously developing an innovative and inclusive food-centered economy. La Cocina provides assistance to women, immigrants and people of color which aligns with the diverse and economically vulnerable population in the Mission District they are situated within. With food entrepreneurs located in kitchens throughout the community, La Cocina turns illegal and informal home food production into dependable legal businesses benefitting entrepreneurs as well as the community at large. The entrepreneurs selected from their application process begin their experience with a six month pre-incubation period where they received technical assistance to establish their product, marketing, finance, and operations foundations. After successful completion of this program, they begin working in the kitchen and the true incubation of their product. Upon graduation businesses remain a part of the community through an alumni network. Their current and graduated participants largely focus on foods from the entrepreneurs heritage bringing a “taste of home” to their local community. In addition to their primary work as an incubator La Cocina also operates an online store, selling gift boxes made up of products produced by their entrepreneurs and branded items, provides catering from their entrepreneurs, workshops open to the public, and an annual gala and conference (La Cocina).

### **Livingston Food Resource Center, Livingston, MT**

The Livingston Food Resource Center is a an anti-hunger nonprofit in Livingston, MT that includes a food pantry, community kitchen, and other community services. While it is not clear from the website whether the community kitchen is still up and running, the facility served the low-income community and offered affordable hourly rates scaled based on the phase of the business (Livingston Food Resource Center).

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### **Mixing Bowl, Albuquerque, NM**

Mixing Bowl food incubator in Albuquerque, NM offers a full range of kitchen and business services. The Mixing Bowl came out of efforts to improve economic development in the region and serves food entrepreneurs. It offers special services for minority, women, and veteran entrepreneurs. Clients have access to training, mentoring, business plan writing, and product approval through a partnership with the South Valley Economic Development Center. There are also opportunities for collaborations, and connections to distributors, packaging facilities, and vending (Mixing Bowl).

### **Quad Cities Food Hub, Davenport, IA**

Quad Cities Food Hub a bi-state initiative between Illinois and Iowa that connects farmers and consumers to increase regional local food production and consumption. The organization seeks to achieve this goal through education and training. Additionally, the organization has a fully equipped and licensed shared commercial kitchen in Davenport, Iowa. The commercial kitchen can be rented for low hourly rates which help eliminate overhead cost for new food entrepreneurs. Clients who use the kitchen receive menu planning, business education, and product development assistance (Quad Cities Food Hub).

### **Rutgers Food Innovation Center, Bridgeton, NJ**

The Rutgers Food Innovation Center (RFIC) in Bridgeton, NJ is a for-profit unit of Rutgers University and The NJ Agricultural Experiment Station focused on a combined mission of food business incubation and economic development acceleration. RFIC offers a robust range of services for both startup and established food and agriculture value-added businesses focused on four major areas, business and technical mentoring, training and specialized services, product manufacturing, and international trade services. These comprehensive services include marketing research, focus groups, federal, state and local food safety documentation, analytical and microbiological testing, product development including labeling, packaging, and product preparation and handling instructions, sensory evaluations, quality assurance, and technical and lab services. RFIC's 23,000 sq. ft. facility includes shared-use processing areas for refrigerated foods processing, beverages and hot processing, bakery and dry processing, and a cold assembly/clean room as well as including client services areas such as a conference room, library, office space, research kitchen and laboratories. Their mission is to "stimulate and support sustainable economic growth and prosperity to the food and agricultural industry by providing businesses with innovative

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research, customized practical solutions, resources for business incubation and a trusted source for information and guidance” (Rutgers Food Innovation Center).

### **Spice Kitchen Incubator, Salt Lake City, UT**

Spice Kitchen Incubator in partner with Salt Lake County offers access to a commercial kitchen and technical and business training for entrepreneurs who are marginalized, including refugees . Spice Kitchen focuses on marketing and branding with direct connection from their kitchen to their market space. A particular aspect of the incubation program is the use of Spice Kitchen’s brand to support participating food businesses. Access to their commercial kitchen is subsidized and costs anywhere from \$15 to \$25 per hour. Spice Kitchen offers access to capital for participants by connecting them to microloans. They also host workshops for the general public to generate income. Their program includes an application process and 3 steps (pre-incubation, incubation, and graduation) (Spice Kitchen).

### **Starting Block, Hart, MI**

Starting Block is a nonprofit food-business incubator in Hart, Michigan with a mission to support entrepreneurs in the food and natural resource sector. Starting Block provides aspiring entrepreneurs with a shared use commercial kitchen that is licensed and approved by Michigan Department of Agriculture for rent at a low hourly wage. The facility includes equipment, storage space, and a USDA-inspected meat processing facility (The Starting Block).

### **Union Kitchen: No Ma, Washington D.C**

Union Kitchen: No Ma, founded in 2012, is a Washington, DC based food business incubator co-founded by Jonas Singer and Cullen Gilchrist. The co-founders needed a kitchen to make their award winning Blind Dog Cafe chocolate chip cookies. After moving into a 7,500 square foot warehouse with one of the only viable commercial kitchens in the area, the co-founders realized they had too much space. Recognizing that other food businesses needed production space, they began to rent the kitchen and its amenities to expanding businesses. Union Kitchen provides business services to help members access capital and distribute their product nationally and internationally. The incubator recently opened its own retail outlet called Union Kitchen Grocery on Capitol Hill where members and local food businesses can sell their products (Union Kitchen).

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University of Wisconsin-Extension Food Business Innovation Network, Madison WI  
The University of Wisconsin Extension maintains an updated list of rentable kitchen facilities and packing facilities in the state. The website also provides resources for starting food businesses and food business incubators. Information for businesses covers licensing and regulations, food safety, and packing and labeling. Information for incubators includes risk management, client services, and incubator management. On Mondays a Small-Scale Food Manufacturing Specialist is available by phone or video to answer questions. The Network partners with other programs within the state and incubators throughout the country including the Rutgers FIC (University of Wisconsin- Extension).

### **Women’s Housing and Economic Development Corporation (WHEDCo), Bronx, NY**

WHEDCo was established in 1996 in the Bronx, NY as a nonprofit community development corporation focused on developing healthy and vibrant communities for chronically impoverished families in the South Bronx. Beginning with the primary goal of building affordable and sustainable homes, their mission has expanded to include increasing accessibility to the broad spectrum of resources that build strong communities including early education and afterschool programs, cultural programming, fresh and healthy food, and economic opportunity. Their Bronx Cookspace food business incubator focuses on these last two goals by providing local aspiring entrepreneurs with four separate workspaces in their fully equipped commercial kitchen available for affordable rates 24/7. The Cookspace also offers one-on-one technical assistance to entrepreneurs, from helping register businesses and obtain licensing and insurance before even being accepted into the program to establishing short and long term goals for the business from the very beginning of their incubation to cost analysis, recipe development, labeling and packaging as businesses develop their product. Serving over 35,000 local residents annually through all of their programming WHEDCo’s economic development initiatives, including the Bronx Cookspace, Home-based Childcare programs, and Commercial Revitalization, help over 500 small business owners establish and operate their businesses each year (WHEDCo).

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## Appendix B. Workers Co-ops

Once the New Brunswick incubator is running with successful participant businesses, a next step would be to determine how the individuals participating will continue to develop their food business. This could mean exploring alternative versions of businesses that cater to low-income or immigrant communities' particular business-expanding needs.

The typical top-down business model of employer and employees may not work for communities with many low-income immigrants. Their lack of access to resources makes it so they have to find and or create alternative methods to use resources they do have to their advantage. This has caused a rise in the number of alternative models of businesses, such as workers cooperatives.

There are a wide variety of other ways to support these individuals. Employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs) allow owners to sell their shares of the business to their employees with large tax savings and social enterprises employ and build career paths with a social mission, particularly for those with employment barriers (Democracy Collaborative, 2016, pg. 2). These are just some examples of other kinds of alternative business models for differing community needs that support business entrepreneurs.

However, there is a specific warrant for focusing on worker cooperatives in New Brunswick. Worker cooperatives (co-ops) are a non-traditional business approach that prioritize collective ownership over the traditional top-down model of employers and employees. Individuals in a cooperative have an equal stake over decisions and how they want their business to develop and they often pool resources. Cooperatives empower underprivileged communities who may face obstacles in the workplace. Workspace hardships can include wage theft, hazardous working conditions, lack of scheduling flexibility, language barriers, and lack of cultural sensitivity. These issues have persisted even after the Great Recession. Many worker co-ops actively resist these obstacles, which has made them increasingly popular. Public interest in cooperatives has surged since the global financial crisis (Abell, 2014, pg. 13) and in the U.S., there are 300 co-ops that employ more than 4,500 people (Democracy at Work, pg. 4).

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We know that growing inequality is bad for families, social cohesion, and ultimately the economy. Lack of economic and social mobility undermines the promise of our democratic institutions. Cooperatives help keep money in the local economy (Democracy at Work, n.d., pg. 6). Co-ops attempt to remediate the gap in wealth by giving its participants an option to collectively build wealth. The money that is collected stays in the community by having locals buy from a collective made up of their neighbors. This is a reason to support co-ops. “More than half of worker cooperatives in the United States today were designed to improve low-wage jobs and build wealth in communities most directly affected by inequality, helping vulnerable workers build skills and earning potential, household income and assets” (Democracy at Work, n.d., pg. 2). Today’s job market is made up of a considerable number of low-wage jobs, so having this alternate model to find employment can help these individuals have a higher wage and, by extension, better quality of life.

In order to have a workers co-op up and running, it must have substantial financial support to help with its inception. Most worker cooperative development in low-income communities to date has been primarily led by private nonprofit organizations, which can provide key long-term capacity over the development process (policies for wealth building, 2014, pg.6). Nonprofits across the nation have been able to provide much of what co-ops need to succeed, from financial support to many of the other services we discussed as being important in starting an incubator.

This would certainly be an interesting business model for New Brunswick to consider adopting should the incubator project become successful over the next few years. We are excited to see its growth, whichever path it may take.