COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY • COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
UK

The Business *of* Catering

Catering is an exciting, challenging, and creative endeavor that can be both financially rewarding and fun. But don't turn on the oven just yet! A successful caterer should have some basic knowledge and abilities, as well as be informed of complex local, state, and federal regulations. This publication is intended as a guide for those interested in starting a catering business.

➡ TRAITS & SKILLS

❶ **You must be a good cook.** Imagination and creativity are part of understanding basic food chemistry. If you are a slave to recipes and precision measurement, cooking for large numbers may not be for you. It helps to be flexible as you develop expertise through experience in learning how ingredients vary. With practice, the once new experiences become old hat.

❷ **You must be organized.** Time is money. Being organized can be learned and continually improved. But a major key to organization is to concentrate on one thing at a time. Make daily lists so no energy will be wasted and like jobs can be performed efficiently. Prioritize jobs so that you work on the most urgent first, when you're at your best. Running a successful business means your life must become more organized and compartmentalized.

❸ **You must be able to work hard and under pressure.** Catering involves hard physical work and sometimes long hours. Stamina and lots of energy are needed. Focusing on one thing at a time can reduce panic. Panic is simply a reaction of worrying about what you still have to do instead of concentrating on what you're doing. So, you learn to roll with the punches.

❹ **You must have personality.** Catering is a personal service business. It is an opportunity to meet all kinds of people. You must like people and be able to relate to their needs. If you already have these basic characteristics but no practical experience, you may want to work in the field before starting your own business. Be prepared to give up time with your family and friends, hobbies and civic activities while you start a new business.

Now, you're ready to look at the rules and regulations of a catering business. **Never attempt to start any business without first checking all local, state, and federal regulations BEFORE doing business.**

➡ REGULATIONS, LICENSES & PERMITS

Kitchen Facilities

The Kentucky Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act and State Retail Food Code prohibit the sale of foods prepared in a home kitchen. So to cater in Kentucky you must have a certified kitchen separate from the kitchen used by your family. This separate facility must be inspected and approved by the local health department.

A separate kitchen can be built in the basement, a converted garage, or a building not being used for another purpose. Before beginning any construction or remodeling, submit floor plans and plumbing plans that adhere to building codes and zoning laws. Contact your local health department well in advance about kitchen equipment requirements. Plumbing must be done by a licensed plumber and inspected by the Division of Plumbing, 1047 US Hwy 127S, Frankfort, KY 40601; 502/564-3580.

If constructing a new facility or remodeling an existing one seems too expensive, you might be able to rent an approved or certified kitchen. Often, a church or other non-profit organization with an approved facility will allow you to use its kitchen for a small fee. Small restaurants may be available for rent during off-hours. Even when renting, an annual permit is required.

The State Retail Food Code contains safe food preparation regulations. You should be familiar with all safe food handling practices. Food Safety Manager and Foodhandler Certifications are mandatory in many areas of Kentucky.