New Cottage Food Law Offers Business Opportunities

The California Homemade Food Law was passed in September 2012 and became effective January 2013. This law opens the door for a growing movement of community-based food production in home kitchens, sometimes called "cottage food".

The new law allows microenterprises that prepare low-risk foods to operate without investing in a commercial kitchen. The law lists the specific low-risk foods that are allowed to be prepared in a cottage food operation. The new law does not extend to products containing meat or dairy, but allows baked goods, granola, trail mix, popcorn, candies, dried fruit, coffee, tea, jams, jellies, vinegar, mustard, pickles and other low-risk items.

There are two types of cottage food operations. Class A cottage food operations (direct sale to the consumer only), must register on-line with Santa Barbara County Environmental Health Services and submit a completed “self-certification checklist”. Class B cottage food operations (direct sale to the consumer and/or indirect sales through a middleman), have additional requirements and must be inspected and permitted by Environmental Health Services.

Larry Fay, Director of Environmental Health Services stated, “This offers great opportunities for our community. Cottage Food Operations promote locally produced products and brings the consumer closer to producer.” He also reinforced that it is important that operators work within the framework and guidelines of the cottage food law to assure the products are safe for consumers. Improperly prepared food can lead to foodborne illness.

Individuals who are considering initiating a new cottage food operation or are interested in additional information about the law are encouraged to learn more. Santa Barbara County has developed guidelines for cottage food operators within the County that are available on the website www.sbcphd.org/ehs. There is additional information on the California Department of Public Health website: www.cdph.ca.gov.

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