

# CommonWealth Kitchen

*Boston's non-profit food business incubator & small-batch contract manufacturer*



Common goals  
Common purpose  
CommonWealth

Sample  
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Coverage

196 Quincy Street  
Dorchester, MA. 02121

[www.commonwealthkitchen.org](http://www.commonwealthkitchen.org)



## COMMON WEALTH KITCHEN 2015 BEST INCUBATOR

Formerly known as CropCircle Kitchen, this culinary incubator is a haven for upstart jam-makers and chocolate connoisseurs looking for a shared space to turn their craft into a business.

Last year, the organization took this to a new level with a massive new food-production facility featuring shared kitchen space, co-packing capabilities, and standalone workspaces for the likes of Alex's Ugly Sauce and Just Add Cooking.



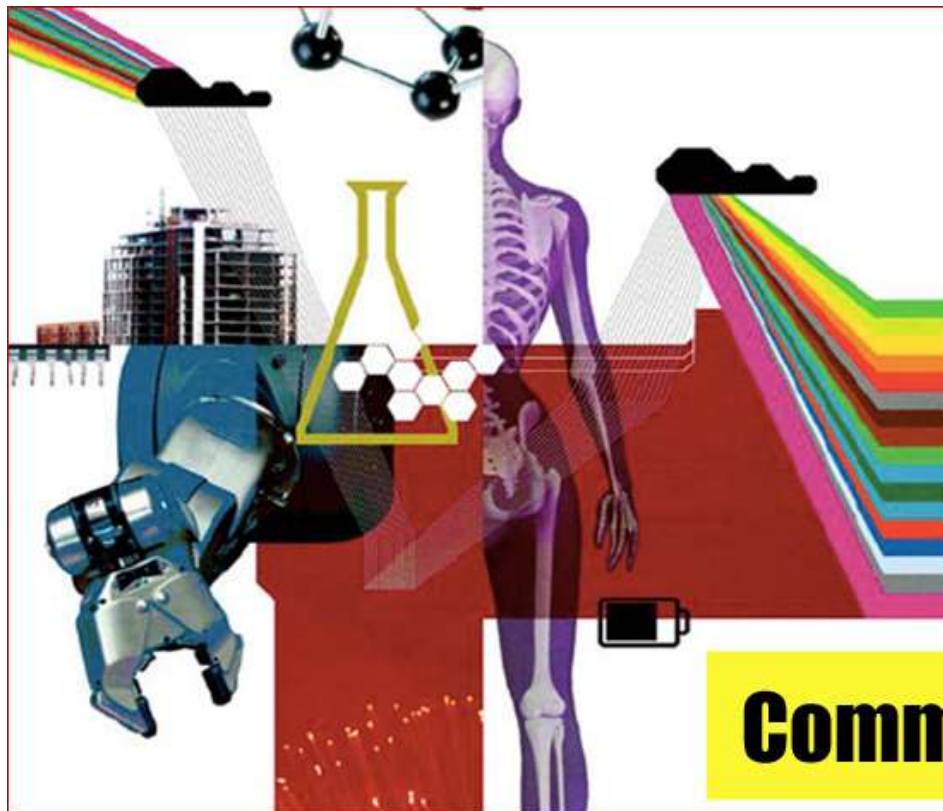


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Programs are helping everyone from hopeful food entrepreneurs to the city's ambitious students develop their ideas. While some investors are jumping into socially responsible projects.



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**CommonWealth Kitchen**



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## CommonWealth Kitchen: Food with a Mission



By Joshua Berman  
Project Coordinator, SBN

My earliest memories of food are ones that are shared. Sitting around a butcher-block table with my family, eating good and simple food, leaning too far back in my beat-up, red chair and falling off more often than not. Food for me has always been a shared experience and a collaborative process. At **Commonwealth Kitchen** (originally Cropcircle Kitchen), collaboration is king.

We at **SBN** are proud to say that this year will be our second collaboration with Commonwealth Kitchen to bring delicious local food right to you your tastebuds at our free annual **Boston Local Food Festival**—this year on Sunday, September 18th on the Rose Kennedy Greenway.

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Walking into CWK, the kitchen buzzes like a beehive as the staff and entrepreneurs carry out their daily tasks and routines. All the white pots, pans, and baking sheets rattle and clank – a tell-tale sign of a productive kitchen.

Community and Operations Manager Roz Freeman writes “Taking a step into the lobby of Commonwealth Kitchen, you immediately get a sense of the community among the entrepreneurs, employees, and CWK staff, and the passion behind what everyone does.” Workers from **Fresh Food Generation** share their lunches with other hungry staffers, cascades of scents from **Third Cliff Bakery** cookies to fresh herbs and broths from **Five Way Foods** waft through the kitchen, and Executive Chef Brad Stevens hops around, visiting members, catching up, tasting **Noodle Lab**'s newest recipe and delivering expert advice.



Commonwealth Kitchen envisions “an equitable world and sustainable food system that provides each of us with access to the resources we need to live, learn, work, and thrive to succeed.” By offering shared kitchen space and integrated business assistance to food entrepreneurs – with an emphasis on those “impacted by racial, social, and economic inequality” – Commonwealth Kitchen is working to make their vision of our world a reality. From food trucks and artisanal spices to cake pops and meal kits, CWK has graduated over 45 local food businesses and is currently supporting 34 more.

When you look at the numbers, CWK's awe-inspiring success becomes immediately evident. In 2015, 70% of their member businesses were owned by women and/or people of color. During peak production, these businesses employed over 150 people, 70% of whom were women and/or people of color themselves. Combined, CWK's graduates in addition to their current member companies generate over \$20 million in annual revenue and employ over 450 people.

This is not a simple kitchen, this is an economic hub and a heart of community development. Think of each impact point as a beat of the heart, and imagine that empowerment is the life-blood of the organization. With each beat CWK delivers crucial oxygen throughout the body – supporting all economic actors, including those in the extremities. The cumulative effect of each positive impact CWK achieves is equal to far greater than its initial economic value.

And where do we fit in? Well, we get to splurge on all their delicious foods knowing we are supporting an amazing initiative that is strengthening our local economy.



Try the decadent flavors of **little g ice cream company** – founded by 16 year old Grace Connor – or sample the luxurious lactose free ice-cream from women-owned **Minus the Moo**. Prefer something a little lighter? Give **Jubali Juice** a try! Need a kick-start? Grab some honey-sweetened chocolate from **Apotheker's Kitchen**. Or maybe a caffeine boost from **Commonwealth Cold Brew**. Feeling adventurous? The beet-based hot sauce from **Alex's Ugly Sauce** has a strong flavor profile and different heat levels for everyone from the uninitiated to the most experienced hot sauce connoisseurs.

Boston Local Food Festival has been lucky to host a number of CWK graduates and members and showcase their tasty and creative products. This year, Commonwealth Kitchen you can get a taste of the action in the CWK Tent right beside the **Greenway Carousel** at the intersection of the **Greenway** and **South Market Street**.

## A sweet sense of purpose

Baker expands reach from West Roxbury to South Station

Karen Morales | 8/31/2016, 11:24 a.m.



(l-r) Danielle McLean, Carlene O'Garro, and Kiana Soriano-Lara. PHOTO: KAREN MORALES

"It's like comedy hour in here," said Carlene O'Garro, her work associates at Delectable Desires Pastries laughing in agreement. "We've talked about how we should probably have our own YouTube channel."

O'Garro is a pastry chef and owner of the bakery nestled on Centre Street, West Roxbury's main commercial thoroughfare. Although customers shouldn't expect a YouTube series anytime soon, a second location is slated to open in South Station this fall.



She co-manages the store with fellow baker Danielle McLean. Two other baker women make up the close-knit team that spends endless hours making extravagant cakes and baking indulgent treats.

"We all work well together and we all have a sense of humor, so that's great," said McLean, who has been with the pastry shop for more than a year. "Because we all love what we do, it's different from just punching in and punching out."

Delectable Desires Pastries has been operating as a brick-and-mortar shop since January 2015. Before that, O'Garro had been baking as a wholesale professional since 2007, her career rooted in childhood memories and an appetite for passion.

She showed a keen interest in baking at the age of four as she observed her mother in the kitchen. When O'Garro was around eight years old, she recalls watching her mother add a dash of liquor to the cake batter and starting to experiment with ingredients on her own. "She gave me creative freedom," O'Garro said.

When she grew up, the Mattapan native studied biology and psychology at Jacksonville University, and engaged in baking as a hobby. At that time she was gearing up for a legal career, having been accepted at Suffolk University Law School, but then — a change of heart.

"I worked a little bit in corporate and was like, 'Yeah this isn't for me,'" O'Garro recalled. "I didn't feel fulfilled."

Thinking back to shared moments baking with her mom, she enrolled in a one-year program at the Cambridge School of Culinary Arts. Instead of staying up late poring over legal cases, she decorates cakes into the early hours of the morning.

"I like to come in at 12 or 1 in the morning and decorate," O'Garro said. "It's just when all my creative juices are flowing."

After graduating from her culinary school program, O'Garro began concocting a plan to run a wholesale bakery business. "I just made pastries, and literally went door to door to different cafés, handing out samples," she said. "I typed up a product guide, and sold things for 50 cents."

She also joined CropCircle Kitchen, a shared-use kitchen commissary and culinary incubator where she began to amass her clientele.

"I got so busy with the cake business that I couldn't make it out of my house anymore, and was using too many hours at CropCircle Kitchen," she said. The natural next step: opening a retail space for Delectable Desires Pastries.

Today, the wholesale business provides baked items to ongoing clients such as Whole Foods retail locations all over New England.

INCUBATOR WEEK DAY FOUR

## No two incubators think alike

*From social impact to zero waste, these eight models shape programs around priorities*

BY DANAE MCLEDD | MARCH 17, 2016

The word “incubator” doesn’t seem an adequate identifier for the business development centers on our list. Truth is, it’s a catch-all word that means many different things in many different places. There’s really no one-size-fits-all incubator.

By some accounts there are as many as 200 food incubators across the country (possibly as many as 500); each one has its own identity and serves its own particular population. Sure, these institutions build food businesses, but they also catalyze communities, close loops, make names, pioneer programs, preserve recipes and mobilize forces.

Perhaps “birthplace” is a better word, then. These eight influential incubators have birthed so much more than just food.

March 2016



The Sharing Network: Commonwealth Kitchen  
Boston, MA

“Our focus is on people impacted by racial, social, and economic inequality,” says Commonwealth Kitchen executive director Jen Faigel.

The group has two facilities, one in Dorchester and one in Jamaica Plain, with a total of 41,000-square-feet of commissary space and warehousing capabilities. The kitchen’s website lists 37 current members, including Little G Ice Cream Co. and Baja Taco Truck.

“

Our focus is on people impacted by racial, social, and economic inequality.

Programs include: a six-week Food Business 101 seminar, an advanced business development class with Boston’s Public Market, and classes in English as a second language and Cape Verdean Creole. Commonwealth often hosts guest speakers, like brewing giant Sam Adams, to discuss labeling, branding, and legal issues. Members can meet with industry experts who share their advice and can answer questions like “what’s the difference between equity and debt?”

Also on offer is an employee sharing network, and Commonwealth continues to invest in manufacturing equipment for co-packing.

Members point to the networking possibilities, which lead to collaborations and opportunities to expand. Member company Top Shelf Cookies was able to partner with Sam Adams to create cookies to give away at the Boston Marathon this year and sells a group of rotating flavors via incubator member Fresh Food Generation’s farm-to-plate food truck. Owner Heather Younger says “I’ve really been able to utilize the community in the kitchen and it’s turned into success for me.”

# CommonWealth Kitchen teams up with Mei Mei Street Kitchen!

February 2016



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### Ingredients of success

Dorchester firm helps foodies scale up retail operations

Martin Desmarais | 2/17/2016, 11:09 a.m.



Two of three sauces Mei Mei Street Kitchen manufactures at CommonWealth Kitchen are Apple Hoisin and Cranberry Sweet & Sour. PHOTO COURTESY OF MEI MEI STREET KITCHEN

Food startup incubator CommonWealth Kitchen can already be credited with helping cook up some of the most creative and popular small food businesses in Boston — from food trucks to catering services to online retail brands — but now the organization has jumped into small-scale manufacturing in an attempt to further help the city's burgeoning small business food sector.

Its first manufacturing deal has helped Mei Mei Street Kitchen, a sibling-run food truck and restaurant serving Chinese-American cuisine, launch its first line of specialty products, as well as an entirely new business arm. With first manufacturing done in December and subsequent production in January, the company's "Pantry at Mei Mei" line has now launched three sauces for sale online and at some local grocery stores.

The sauces — Apple Hoisin, Cranberry Sweet & Sour and Smoked Maple Ginger — are derived from the sauces used in the making of Mei Mei's cuisine. The food company has a small restaurant on Park Drive between Fenway and Boston University, a container food kiosk at the Innovation & Design Building in the Seaport District and a food truck that travels around Boston.



Photo courtesy of Mei Mei Street Kitchen

Siblings (clockwise from left) Margaret "Mei" Li, Andrew Li and Irene Li, founders of Mei Mei Street Kitchen.

Mei Mei was launched with its food truck service out of Gourmet Caterers in Roslindale in 2012. A year later, the company opened its restaurant. Last fall, it opened the container location.

The sauce line is the next step in the company's expansion.

"We had a lot of people ask could we get this sauce to take home and that kind of spurred us into thinking it would be great for people to be able to buy this that couldn't get into the restaurant and also expand to a wider audience and expand our brand and our reach," said Margaret "Mei" Li, who handles Mei Mei Street Kitchen's business development. She started the business along with her brother Andrew and sister Irene. Andrew runs the restaurant and events and Irene runs the kitchen and back of the house operations.



Photo courtesy of Mei Mei Street Kitchen

Apple Hoisin and Smoked Maple Ginger are two sauces offered by Mei Mei Street Kitchen.

### Kitchen help

But as is the case with many small-businesses with aspirations for growth along the retail lines there is always one big problem — not enough resources or expertise to handle the actual manufacturing of products.

This is where CommonWealth Kitchen wants to step in for Boston's

small food businesses, and Mei Mei has proved the perfect case in point.

Small manufacturing facilities often need to run thousands of products at a time to make it profitable on their end.

A business like Mei Mei, hoping to run off a couple hundred bottled sauces to test and launch the product, has no real place to turn. Although there are small-scale manufacturing facilities out there, locally there are not many options.



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"Mei" Li said it wasn't hard for her company to come up with the products for their first sauce line or even to have confidence that there was a demand, but how to manufacture a line of products was not something any of the sibling co-founders understood.

"What is great is that CommonWealth Kitchen has the expertise to actually produce it," said Li. "It would have been very difficult for us to start without CommonWealth Kitchen. ... We couldn't handle it."

CommonWealth Kitchen Executive Director Jen Faigel acknowledges the difficulty of scaling up food production.

“In the food industry a lot of businesses don’t actually make their product. They hire someone to do it for them,” Faigel said. “They may want to, but they realize they don’t have the licenses, they don’t have the equipment or the expertise.”

The contract with Mei Mei shows how CommonWealth Kitchen can help a business develop a retail product and take it to market and keep producing the product for sales.

CommonWealth Kitchen has one kitchen facility in Dorchester and one in Jamaica Plain for a combined 40,000 square feet of cooking, prepping, storing and packaging space to offer a small food business looking to get off the ground. At any given time, CommonWealth Kitchen has about 40 different small food businesses using their facilities.

The advantage for the small businesses is that they can rent the facilities only when they need them to cook, bake or prepare food and not have to pay for rental space or kitchens not in use. CommonWealth Kitchen also has the most advanced food cooking, prepping and storage equipment — the kind of stuff that a small business could never afford to just buy at startup.

Well over 25 different small food businesses have “graduated” from CommonWealth Kitchen and are now off with their own locations and facilities.

The other key factor is that CommonWealth Kitchen also has experienced food staff that can



Photo courtesy of Mei Mei Street Kitchen

The sauce used on this Maple Noodle dish, served at Mei Mei Street Kitchen’s restaurant, is an example of what inspired its new sauce line.

The other key factor is that CommonWealth Kitchen also has experienced food staff that can

be hired as needed. This staff plays a big role in manufacturing work as well.

For CommonWealth Kitchen the goal is to have its staff manufacturing products for all different companies and create fulltime jobs for these workers.

“One day a week they might work for one food business and the next day work for another,” said Faigel. “We can aggregate contracts. It is part of our job strategy for us as an organization.”



Photo courtesy of Mei Mei Street Kitchen

The Mei Mei Street Kitchen food truck.

According to Faigel, the deal with Mei Mei Street Kitchen is just the start of the manufacturing work.

CommonWealth Kitchen produced 350 bottles of sauces for Mei Mei in December and in January produced another 500 bottles that the food business is selling online and in local specialty food stores.

According to Faigel, her organization has about 20 other such contracts in the works and hopes to continue to ramp up its small-scale manufacturing work. As another example, CommonWealth Kitchen is helping Island Creek Oysters manufacture its own cocktail sauce line.

“Lots of different companies come to us and say we need help to do this,” Faigel said. “This is a great way to create jobs but also help businesses scale as well.”



# CommonWealth Kitchen juggles old, new services



Jackson Reushaw stirred a stew at the Commonwealth Kitchen in Dorchester. Much of the work at the shared working space is done by small vendors who sell their wares at the Boston Public Market.

By Jill Terreri Ramos | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT DECEMBER 16, 2015

It's late morning and inside a commercial kitchen in Dorchester two chefs are standing around rimmed baking sheets lined with brown paper towels. They're sampling some churros that just came out of the deep fryer and talking about adjustments. Maybe they should use fewer eggs, maybe the dough needs to rest a while before cooking, they say. Commonwealth Kitchen executive chef Brad Stevens suggests a hint of acid, maybe some citrus zest.

Stevens and his colleague Seth Morrison are working on the churros for Taza Chocolate, based in Somerville. Taza representatives approached Commonwealth Kitchen, a nonprofit, to develop a recipe so they could sell the snack alongside their hot chocolate at the Boston Public Market. Stevens hopes the assignment leads to steady orders, which will help the organization support its core mission of incubating small businesses and creating local jobs.

CommonWealth Kitchen's managers have found there is significant demand from local companies and farmers for this kind of contract work, which the organization began doing in June. The companies can be a part of the development process and have oversight over ingredient sourcing and production, attention they might not get from a larger manufacturer.

"Because we're doing small-batch, we're able to be nimble and work more in partnership with the companies," said executive director Jen Faigel.

The opening of the contract kitchen has been a big part of CommonWealth's growth, from three full-time and one part-time employee and a budget of \$300,000 in 2013 to 12 employees and a budget of \$1.3 million in 2015.

CommonWealth Kitchen, known as CropCircle Kitchen when it started in 2009 in Jamaica Plain, began as a place where local food businesses could get off the ground. While it still offers local entrepreneurs shared space for a fee in licensed kitchens in Jamaica Plain and in the former Pearl meat factory in Dorchester, the contract kitchen provides additional needed revenue. The renovation of the former meat factory cost \$15 million, for instance.

The contract work performed by CommonWealth employees was initially offered for a fee to the organization's 45 members — food trucks and food manufacturers. The program has since expanded to outside companies such as Taza and Mei Mei, a Chinese-American food truck and restaurant.

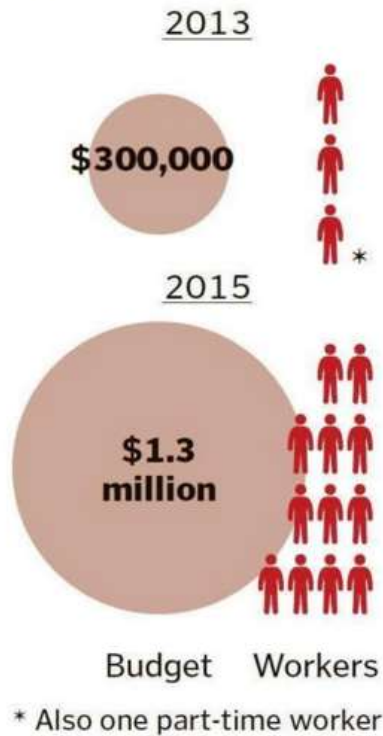
More than half of CommonWealth's member businesses — 65 percent — are women- or minority-owned, and just under 70 percent of their workforces are women and people of color. All member businesses must commit to hiring locally when they can, with a focus on women and minority workers from the city.

For a monthly fee of \$350, member businesses get 10 hours of kitchen time and access to technical assistance, including recipe development and marketing help.

But for businesses that often struggle to find reliable employees because much of the work is part time, the contract kitchen provides access to reliable labor.

## Food services

Growth of CommonWealth Kitchen since it began doing contract manufacturing work in June.



# CommonWealth Kitchen juggles old, new services



Dajuan Alexander poured hot water into a bottling machine.

KELVIN SCOPFORD/GLOBE PHOTOS

On a recent morning, Morrison, Stevens, and two contract kitchen employees juggled two other projects as they worked on the churros: preparing shallots for a farmer who wanted to turn his excess crop into shallot jam, and cooking tomato sauce for two farms that had about 15,000 excess pounds of heirloom, Roma, and field tomatoes.

On other days, they bottle sauces for Mei Mei, such as apple hoisin and cranberry sweet and sour, and prepare and make food for vendors at the Boston Public Market, including apple crisp for Red Apple Farm, pasta for Nella Pasta, a Commonwealth graduate, and soup stock for Noodle Lab, a Commonwealth member.

As Commonwealth's chefs were perfecting churros, across the hall in the shared kitchen a team from Fresh Food Generation was preparing beef empanadas, slicing plantains to freeze, steaming rice, baking potatoes, and assembling yogurt and granola parfaits.

Fresh Food Generation focuses on making healthy, culturally-relevant food accessible to low-income neighborhoods. It operates a food truck during the warmer months and a year-round catering business based at Commonwealth Kitchen.

When the company became a Commonwealth Kitchen member, it had done 2,000 catered meals over four months. Today, it regularly prepares between 600 and 1,000 meals every week and is poised for more growth.

Cofounder Cassandra Campbell said as a member business she has gained valuable mentoring and help streamlining kitchen practices. Her business has also benefitted from Commonwealth's contract kitchen, which makes sauce for her food truck's jerk chicken, a labor-intensive process. The contract kitchen was also used to vacuum-seal excess meat, which will make it last longer. Campbell is now able to accept large catering jobs knowing that the workforce in the contract kitchen can supplement her own nine-person staff.

"As a caterer, sometimes we'll get calls last minute for a huge event," Campbell said. "There's no way I could say yes to that if it was only my team doing the work."



Phi Lang of Fresh Food Generation sorted herbs.

KELVIN SCOPFORD/GLOBE STAFF

Jill Terreri Ramos can be reached at [jill.ramos@globe.com](mailto:jill.ramos@globe.com). Follow her on Twitter @jillterreci.

## Commonwealth Kitchen

# This Kitchen Is in the Business of Empowering Local Entrepreneurs

CommonWealth Kitchen is a food incubator that's launching careers and bringing delicious food to underserved areas of Boston.

By Lisa Johnson



Casandra Campbell of Fresh Food Generation brings Caribbean and Latin flavor to Boston through a farm-to-plate food truck. (Photo: Courtesy of the Kendall Foundation)

Formerly known as CropCircle Kitchen, CommonWealth Kitchen (CWK) is part of a growing food innovation movement taking place in the Boston area. For culinary entrepreneurs, CWK offers shared commercial kitchens and business assistance at their Dorchester and Jamaica Plain locations.

### ABOUT CRAVING BOSTON

WGBH and award-winning journalist Catherine Smart are on a mission to bring you the best local food stories, served fresh daily. For decades, we've delivered the cooking shows you know and love. Now we're going out into the community to explore all aspects of our region's food culture.

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Voted **Best Incubator** by *Boston Magazine* for 2015, CWK is bringing a lot more than good food to the table. Their accolades include winning a \$200,000 state grant, which will allow them to launch a local food manufacturing initiative intended to grow small businesses and create more food manufacturing jobs in Dorchester and Roxbury.

The incubator's food retailers produce a variety of globally-influenced products, sold all over Boston and beyond. Cassandra Campbell and Jackson Renshaw, co-founders of **Fresh Food Generation**, run a farm-to-plate food truck and catering business with the mission of improving access to food that is "good to you AND good for you." They serve all of Greater Boston, but focus on underserved neighborhoods with limited access to quality foods. Their menu is influenced by Latin American and Caribbean cuisine, with specialties like jerk chicken and sweet plantains.



The Haitian condiment Pickliz from The Craic & Blonde makes a zesty topper for everything from eggs to oysters. (Photo: thecraicandblonde.com)

For another taste of the islands, vendor Blonde Beauchamp, owner of **The Craic and Blonde**, creates makes *Pickliz* [pronounced PICK-lease], a traditional Haitian condiment that is a sweet and spicy blend of pickled vegetables and habanero peppers. Producing through Commonwealth Kitchen has allowed Beauchamp to sell her product in over a dozen retail stores, including **Formaggio Kitchen** in the South End, **Commonwealth** in Cambridge, **Shubies** in Marblehead, and **American Provisions** in South Boston.



Baker Heather Yunger combines her love of sports and sweets at Top Shelf Cookies. (Photo: Lucas Mulder)

For dessert, try **Third Cliff Bakery's** herb-infused shortbreads. Owner Meg Crowley uses flavors like rosemary, lemon-thyme and lavender to add interest to the buttery tea-time snacks. There's even a bakery sweet on Boston sports; Bruins fans will appreciate **Top Shelf Cookies**, where owner Heather Yunger sells her signature Black & Golds — chewy, dark chocolate confections with peanut butter chips — which are best-sellers at the hockey team's home games. As Yunger writes on her website, "Hockey fans know the top shelf is where the best cookies are hidden."

CWK's Executive Director and Co-Founder Jen Faigel thinks that those not familiar with their work would be surprised by the complexity of the operation. "We're coordinating and supporting 45-plus early stage wholesale and retail food companies in a shared kitchen facility." They also provide marketing help, hiring assistance, and a whole range of other business support services. Faigel, who previously worked in affordable housing, was looking for a job that would help empower people and improve their economic reality in more ways than putting a roof over their head. "The idea of focusing on sustainable employment and wealth creation resonated strongly for me," she says. With the non-profit currently going through a large expansion — going from a staff of three with a budget around \$300,000 in 2013 to a staff of more than twelve and a budget of \$1.3 million in 2015 — Faigel feels they are meeting their goals.

CWK is making good on their mission to support entrepreneurs in underserved communities, while serving customers some of the tastiest food around Boston. The proof is in the Pickliz.

**CommonWealth Kitchen** - 196 Quincy St., Dorchester,  
[commonwealthkitchen.org](http://commonwealthkitchen.org)

*Lisa Johnson writes the lifestyle blog [Anali's Next Amendment](#). Follow her on Twitter [@AnaliFirst](#).*

**Topic** Neighborhood Nosh

WGBH

Jan. 2016



HOME // MASSACHUSETTS // COMMONWEALTH KITCHEN HELP // FARMERS AND FOOD BUSINESS

# CommonWealth Kitchen Helps Farmers and Food Businesses



It was a productive season for many New England farmers and for CommonWealth Kitchen as well. The bountiful harvests provided a new way for CommonWealth Kitchen to support the *New England Food Vision*. This year, [CommonWealth Kitchen](#), a non-profit shared kitchen and food business incubator, embarked on a series of new projects to support local farmers and strengthen our role as a Boston food innovation hub.



CommonWealth Kitchen's mission is to promote small business, create jobs, and support the regional food economy. To fulfill our mission, we operate a shared kitchen, provide technical assistance to our start-up food businesses, and offer a range of contract manufacturing services to our members as well as farmers and local restaurants. On any given day, the kitchen is constantly bustling with our 45

businesses: the bakers, juicers, salsa-makers, chocolatiers, and food trucks preparing food for catering orders, local shops, eaters on the streets and at farmer's markets.

## Learn More

### Visit our websites

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### Contact

Karen Spiller  
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## Sub-Networks

### Massachusetts Food Policy Council (FPC)

[www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/boards-commissions/food-policy-council.html](http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/boards-commissions/food-policy-council.html)

**Massachusetts Food System Plan**  
 Join in envisioning a robust food system for Massachusetts. Go to the website to learn the basics of the planning process, join the discussion on food system solutions, find out about upcoming events and ways to get involved, and check out our food system atlas. [www.mafoodplan.org](http://www.mafoodplan.org)

### Buy local groups



catering orders, local shops, eaters on the streets and at farmer's markets.

We provide a range of contract manufacturing services that aggregate labor and support production and growth for local manufacturers, restaurants, farmers, and our small food businesses. By bringing all of these larger-scale projects under one roof, we're able to support more full-time jobs, and create efficiencies in the process through a knowledgeable staff and large-scale equipment. We currently do contract manufacturing with many of the producers at the Boston Public Market, as well as many of our own small food businesses. This summer, with the yearly bumper crops of local produce, we saw an opportunity to expand our contract manufacturing to local farmers. Two recent projects highlight how we were able to connect different parts of the New England food system:

1. **Higher Ground Farm** is an open-air farm located on the roof of the Boston Design Center in Boston's Seaport District. The owners had surplus basil at the end of the season and wanted to make space for other crops, so they turned to CommonWealth Kitchen. A Higher Ground-CommonWealth Kitchen team produced a line of custom pestos: light green fragrant lemon basil, a traditional purple opal basil, and a peppery thai basil. Working with CommonWealth Kitchen, Higher Ground Farm preserved their beautiful bumper crop of basil for sale as pesto at their farm stand.
2. **Ward's Berry Farm** in Sharon, Massachusetts and **Verrill Farm** in Concord, Massachusetts had a huge bumper crop of tomatoes destined for the compost. These farms, collaborating with the folks who started Stock Pot Malden, brought their tomatoes to CommonWealth Kitchen, where our kitchen team helped them develop the recipe and scheduled process of making custom heirloom tomato marinara. The 15,000 lbs tomatoes were processed by variety, peeled and seeded, custom-blended, frozen, and jarred for future sale on the farms.



With value-added processing, these two Massachusetts farmers have broadened their sales to include longer shelf lives and incremental sales margins. CommonWealth Kitchen was able to provide responsive, medium-scale contract production for local farmers, while continuing to build local food businesses, create jobs, and strengthen the regional food economy.

This growing food innovation hub offers a great new set of resources for farmers and food producers. This is but one way that CommonWealth Kitchen is supporting the [New England Food Vision - 50 by 60](#).

*Roz Freeman is the Community and Operations Manager at CommonWealth Kitchen. She manages the intake process, educational programs, local hiring, and has become the official caretaker for CWK's tiny garden out in front of the facility.*



CHARITABLE GIVING

# Meet 9 nonprofit leaders obsessed with making Boston better

Using their smarts and various backgrounds, they're making a difference in education, food, fitness, and social justice.



By Michael Fitzgerald | OCTOBER 28, 2015

## Jen Faigel, CommonWealth Kitchen

Cake Pops Boston, Clover Food Lab, and Voltage Coffee & Art are all “graduates” of Faigel’s [CommonWealth Kitchen](#), which provides food startups with kitchen space and equipment, training, recipe development, and licensing assistance, among other things.

Faigel, a socially conscious developer, has had a hand in improving 225,000 square feet of commercial space aimed at revitalizing neighborhoods as well as in building more than 400 affordable homes. She cofounded CommonWealth Kitchen in 2009 in Jamaica Plain, then in 2014 added a facility in Dorchester in a former hot dog factory. Though Cake Pops, Clover, and Voltage have moved on, CommonWealth Kitchen now houses 50 other food companies.

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## Lactose-free ice cream that tastes like ... ice cream



Katy Flannery, 26, has an all-time favorite food: ice cream. Growing up, she would savor a bowl of the frozen treat every night for dessert. But at 18, the North Attleborough native faced the fact she was lactose-intolerant. She bought some lactose-free ice creams, but they weren't enjoyable. "As a lactose-free consumer, there was no ice cream available to me with texture, taste, and quality," says Flannery, now a nurse at Boston Children's Hospital. So she began to experiment with making her own and used regular milk she then treated with lactase, an enzyme that eliminates the lactose. The result was delicious. Last year, Flannery, with business partner and former college roommate Gwen Burlingame, a marketing specialist, worked with a local lab and launched their company, Minus the Moo. The two churn out premium, lush ice cream made with milk from High Lawn Farm in Lee, and it's lactose-free. At Commonwealth Kitchen in Dorchester, they mix the bases from scratch and use local ingredients to hand-craft small batches of Madagascar vanilla, chocolate, espresso, sea salt chocolate chip, and mint chip (about \$10 for a pint). It's so creamy and full-flavored, you would be hard-pressed to taste any difference. "Our ice cream can be equally enjoyed by everyone," says Burlingame. Available at Golden Goose Market, 179 Commercial St., Boston, 617-367-8134; South End Buttery Market, 312 Shawmut Ave., Boston, 617-482-1015; Foodie's Markets South End, 1421 Washington St., Boston, 617-266-9911;

# Boston BonBon- another great CWK graduate opens a retail spot in Arlington!

## Three food entrepreneurs join forces, and a new business is born



The Local Fare owners (from left) Michelle Wax of Kitchen Millie, Caroline Huffstetler of Nutty Life, and Rita Ng of Boston Bonbon.

By Catherine Smart | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT AUGUST 24, 2016

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Opening a professional kitchen of one's own is no easy task. Paying rent, securing permits, and buying equipment requires a hefty investment of time and money. Which is why many budding food entrepreneurs have turned to local shared kitchens, like Commonwealth Kitchen in Boston and Stock Pot Malden.

But the three women who own the Local Fare, the small shared kitchen and retail space that opened in Arlington last month — Michelle Wax of Kitchen Millie, Caroline Huffstetler of Nutty Life, and Rita Ng of Boston Bonbon — were looking to share the load of launching a new kitchen while still having a place they could call their own.

"I used to work at a shared kitchen, and it's just super-duper crowded. I think there were about 150 businesses working out of there," says Huffstetler, who started working the graveyard shift at Stock Pot Malden, pressing nut milks and making vegan cookie dough bites before dawn. "When I first started working out of there, my shift was 3 a.m. to 7 a.m., which wasn't really sustainable for the long term. I always knew I wanted to be able to make a product in house and have a storefront."

Partner Wax also makes cookies, two-bite ones that are customizable. But Wax doesn't see her partners as competition. "Basically we were all looking independently for our own spaces, but as I'm sure you know, it's expensive, and it's a big effort. This was just so much more fun, and enjoyable, and awesome to be able to do it with two other businesses," she says.

Ng, who makes macarons in unique flavors like Vietnamese iced coffee and maple bacon, thinks it's useful that they have similar baking backgrounds, bringing knowledge from their previous shared-kitchen experiences. They also share a business philosophy. "We really want to emphasize local as the theme of our store, we make everything here by hand, and people are supportive of that. . . . It's something that builds the community and the economy," Ng says.

The 800-square-foot space is used as a production facility for the three individual businesses, and also has a retail space featuring local products in addition to the sweet treats and nut milks from the owners. "We are bringing in people we know from the farmers' markets that may not be at the [production] level of Whole Foods, but they have great products. Customers can expect a one-stop shop for local products from Boston," says Wax. They currently sell only packaged products but would like to expand and perhaps have a cafe-type setting in the future.

Other food entrepreneurs have been supportive, and are taking notice of their model. "We've already had a few people come up to us and ask if they can work out of the kitchen, and want to collaborate with us," says Wax.

Huffstetler says they are excited about working with other businesses and could possibly rent out their kitchen to other local startups at some point, but they aren't looking to return to the space-squeeze of a traditional shared kitchen. For now, it seems, three is the perfect-size crowd.

# Baker announces \$3M in 'Urban Agenda' grants

Jan 13, 2016, 2:37pm EST **Updated** Jan 13, 2016, 3:00pm EST

Gov. **Charlie Baker** announced \$3 million in grant funding for a program that will pay for 16 economic development, planning, and housing development initiatives, across 13 communities in Massachusetts.


The state's inaugural "Urban Agenda" program promotes economic vitality and cultivates safer, stronger urban neighborhoods and communities throughout Massachusetts. The program seeks to advance vibrant communities, and unlock economic mobility for residents, through community-based partnerships that address workforce development, entrepreneurship, and mixed-income housing development, according to a release.

*Here are the winners, along with the descriptions of the program:*

## **Boston - \$225,000**

Madison Park Development Corporation will partner with Boston Education, Skills & Training (BEST) Corp., a nonprofit workforce development organization focused on training Boston residents for jobs in the hospitality industry, to create a new hospitality training facility in Dudley Square.

## **Boston - \$200,000**



The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative will partner with CommonWealth Kitchen, Project Hope, and the Local Enterprise Assistance Fund (LEAF) to launch a local food manufacturing initiative that will grow small businesses and create food manufacturing jobs in Dorchester and Roxbury.



Every day, the Fresh Food Generation food truck heads out to Dorchester, Roxbury and other Boston neighborhoods with freshly cooked, locally sourced, healthy, affordable food.

"The goal was to get healthy food into neighborhoods that need it the most," says Cassandra Campbell, the co-owner of Fresh Food Generation. She and her business partner, Jackson Renshaw, work with local farms to increase access to fresh, locally produced foods in neighborhoods where residents have historically struggled to find healthy options.



Through culturally appropriate, prepared foods, Cassandra and Jackson are providing a healthy alternative to fast food and corner stores. They are currently the only food truck serving the Dudley Square neighborhood of Roxbury, and are quickly becoming the go-to caterer for multiple neighborhood organizations. Since launching in 2014, they've been on a roll, quadrupling their food production in less than two years.

Fresh Food Generation's growth can be largely attributed to their partnership with Commonwealth Kitchen, a shared commercial kitchen facility and food business incubator based in Dorchester.

Fresh Food Generation's journey at Commonwealth Kitchen started in August 2014. "Before, we were bouncing around between different commercial kitchens," Cassandra explains, "But Commonwealth Kitchen gave us a place where we could settle down and focus on producing food and building our business, not on finding kitchen space."

Their story is a common one. Many food businesses struggle with turning their great idea into an actual product. The start-up process for food companies is expensive and complex. It takes an enormous amount of time and resources, often exceeding what food business entrepreneurs have in hand when they start out.

"What we saw were amazing entrepreneurs struggling to figure out the mind-numbingly complicated process of starting a food business," says Commonwealth Kitchen Executive Director Jen Faigel. "Finding licensed kitchen space, being able to afford the specialized equipment you need, plus working through all of the complications of health permits, insurance regulations, packaging and labeling requirements, marketing, and distribution - these place enormous burdens on new businesses just trying to get started, and yet for an awful lot of people, having a business or career in the food industry can be a great opportunity."



CommonWealth Kitchen developed as a resource to help remove these barriers, by providing fully-equipped commercial kitchen facilities combined with integrated business assistance to aspiring food businesses.

“Our mission is really about building the infrastructure needed to create strong businesses and jobs within the food sector, and to strengthen the regional food economy,” says Jen. CommonWealth Kitchen allows new and growing food businesses to rent fully-equipped, licensed kitchen space on an hourly basis – and only when they need it. “There was a real need to lower the barriers for people trying to start a business by creating space that people could come in and use affordably when they needed to.”

By helping food businesses develop and expand, CommonWealth Kitchen is aiding in the success of local food businesses as well as the creation of new jobs in the Dorchester community.

“The staff at CommonWealth Kitchen is very in tune with the surrounding neighborhood and the needs so they know how to support our mission of cooking real food,” says Cassandra. Having the support of an organization that understands Fresh Food Generation’s mission has been vital to their success.

“Fresh Food Generation is, by choice, working in low-income communities, so it is a struggle for them to make the economics work,” Jen says. “We worked very closely with them to streamline the cooking process and figure out how to make their pricing work.”

Being a member of CommonWealth Kitchen’s food business incubator means not only receiving technical support from the staff, but also hands on kitchen support. “We are very much engaged with our members around the business development side of what they’re doing, not only getting into our kitchen and having a place to work, but also helping them think about how to scale, reach new markets, and become efficient in their process,” Jen says. The staff teaches new business entrepreneurs how to use the equipment, be an efficient business owner, and even helps with recipe development, purchasing, and marketing.

“Being a food entrepreneur is really challenging – it’s helpful to have the support of other people, and to work in a collaborative environment with other businesses. We all share information that otherwise we would not have access to,” says Cassandra. “We’ve grown tremendously since being at CommonWealth Kitchen and having the support of the staff and the other members has been a huge asset and benefit to us. Neither my business partner nor I come from the culinary world. So having staff that are familiar with the equipment and can teach us more efficient kitchen practices is critical.”

The development and operations of the CommonWealth Kitchen’s new Dorchester location has been supported in part by grant funding from the Henry P. Kendall Foundation. The new facility, which opened at the renovated former Pearl Meats Factory in June of 2014, has more than tripled their kitchen capacity.

“In just the last year I think we started about 25 new businesses that have been able to come online because of our new facility and created 75 new jobs,” says Jen. Since CommonWealth Kitchen’s Jamaica Plain facility opened in 2009 and with the addition of the Dorchester facility, CommonWealth Kitchen has supported more than 100 start-ups.

The development and operations of the Commonwealth Kitchen's new Dorchester location has been supported in part by grant funding from the Henry P. Kendall Foundation. The new facility, which opened at the renovated former Pearl Meats Factory in June of 2014, has more than tripled their kitchen capacity.

"In just the last year I think we started about 25 new businesses that have been able to come online because of our new facility and created 75 new jobs," says Jen. Since Commonwealth Kitchen's Jamaica Plain facility opened in 2009 and with the addition of the Dorchester facility, Commonwealth Kitchen has supported more than 100 start-ups. Today, they have 50 members using their space each month, employing close to 150 people. Over 65% of their businesses are minority and/or women owned. Since their start in 2009, many of Commonwealth Kitchen's enterprises, such as Clover Food Lab, Roxy's Grilled Cheese, Voltage Coffee, Alex's Ugly Sauce, BATCH Ice Cream, Quinn Popcorn, and Nella's Pasta, have gone on to establish their own retail operations.

"It's very helpful being around an organization, culture, staff, and community who really believe everybody deserves access to quality food and quality local jobs," says Cassandra. "I wasn't sure what to expect going into a space with so many businesses, but when I enter Commonwealth Kitchen it's like home away from home."

Learn more: [CommonWealth Kitchen](#)

## Columns

### A 'Wealth of Opportunity



MEGHAN KAVANAUGH

PHOTO CREDIT: MIAM MIAM: HOLLY RIKE; TOPSHELF COOKIES: LUCA S MULDER



Since opening as Crop Circle Kitchen in 2009, culinary incubator **CommonWealth Kitchen** has been churning out success stories: Alums include Roxy's Grilled Cheese and Batch Ice Cream, and new members like Farmhouse Burger Co. are already finding retail space. But the Dorchester-based nonprofit is also growing, expanding from providing commissary space and help with permitting and recipe scaling into contract manufacturing for clients that range from Mei Mei, which is producing sauces for retail sale, to Boston Public Market purveyors. The money those clients bring in should help executive director Jen Faigel subsidize other endeavors, like a forthcoming venture fund that'll help eliminate some worries for businesses ready to leave the nest. "It's a way to give them a graduation plan," she explains. We talked shop with a few CommonWealth-based companies in different incubation stages.

## Columns

### A 'Wealth of Opportunity

SHARE   

MEGHAN KAVANAUGH

PHOTO CREDIT: MIAM MIAM; HOLLY RIKE; TOPSHELF COOKIES; LUCAS MULDER



Miam Miam Macaronerie



When Jennifer Turner and Nicole Kackabi, whose love for French macarons inspired a delivery service that got its start in the insulator's kitchen.

What: Since opening a brick-and-mortar shop in November, they're spending days developing products and getting face-time with customers.

Where: Macarons are served Thu.-Sun. at the South Boston space they share with the Juice Box. (Keep an eye out for bonus-inspired St. Paddy's treats.)

Top Shelf Cookies



When Heather Yonges, a Boston season ticketholder who turned her pragmatic baking experimentation into a business.

What: Yonges has been busy expanding beyond the original Black & Gold—dark chocolate with peanut butter chips—with new flavors, including one made with fellow CommWealth member Alo's Ugly Sauce.

Where: After a successful holiday pop-up at Boston Public Market, she has her sights set on round two in April.

[topshelfcookies.com](http://topshelfcookies.com)



When Co-workers Olin Wilson and Mark Dreving, who started brewing out of a \$500, 500-sq. apartment.

What: Their nights and weekends are spent on product development—and bottling and labeling hundreds of drinks by hand.

Where: They hope to open a cafe someday, but in the meantime, sip the coffee on your couch when big deliveries debut in March and at the South End Farmers' Market starting in May.

[www.coldonebrewery.com](http://www.coldonebrewery.com)

# Learning the business of food

By Sarah Shemkus

March 12, 2015



Liam Madden, founder of juice and tea maker Jubali, described his ideal client.

## The Boston Globe

Veronica Janssens, co-owner of **Batch Ice Cream** in the South End, has been in the frozen confection business for about five years. In between formulating flavors and churning out pints, it can be hard to find time to scrutinize financial statements or plot a course for growth. So, Janssens said, she decided she needed a plan for “running a business in a grown-up sort of way.”

The solution she found was a food-focused business course offered by Interise, a Boston nonprofit that promotes small business and economic development. The 15-week class, part of Interise’s **StreetWise MBA program**, aims to support the growing number of food startups that have popped up in city neighborhoods and rural towns, spurring investment and creating jobs.

With local food showing no sign of slowing, **Interise teamed up with the Jamaica Plain food incubator CropCircle Kitchen and Boston Public Market**, the year-round local food market that is expected to open near the Haymarket MBTA station this summer.

Liz Morningstar, chief executive of Boston Public Market, said the course is part of her organization’s mission to boost homegrown foodie businesses. “It’s also smart business. We necessarily want a stronger pipeline of companies.”

The class includes 15 owners from 10 companies that sell everything from herbal infusion drinks to decadent doughnuts. Some, like Union Square Donuts and Q’s Nutshave already gained buzz for products such as maple bacon donuts and Mexican chocolate almonds. Others are still planning their official launches. All want to find ways for their businesses to grow. At the end of the course, students will have created a three-year business plan.

# Culinary wonderland hosts fledgling businesses

By Callum Borchers- September 6, 2014



CCK staffer Jackson Barros prepares jalapeños for Alex's Ugly Sauce.

Boston's newest startup incubator features some impressive equipment, but instead of laser cutters and 3D printers, the shared workspace boasts a 40-gallon skillet and an oven the size of a bank vault that can bake 600+ cookies at once.

The nonprofit CropCircle Kitchen Inc. will cut the ribbon Monday on a \$14.5 million culinary wonderland on Quincy St. in Dorchester. Dubbed CCK Pearl as a nod to the renovated building it occupies- the former Pearl Meat factory- the incubator will provide industrial-grade kitchen space to as many as 30+ fledgling businesses, including food trucks, bakeries, and salsa makers.

The idea is to give entrepreneurs who might otherwise work out of home kitchens access to tools to speed production and help grow their businesses faster.

“A new business could never afford to buy this equipment,” said Jen Faigel, the group's executive director. “It's a game changer for a small food business that's trying to scale.”

## The Boston Globe

## Scenes from 2015 HUBweek

HUBweek is a week-long series of events and experiences that will celebrate the intersection of art, science, and technology in the city of Boston. OCTOBER 13, 2015 | 11:58 AM

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< 1 of 64 >

**Adam Hirsh, founder of the Exodus Bagel project, demonstrates the art of making authentic New York style bagels. He hopes to have a storefront soon but in the meantime bakes out of Commonwealth Kitchen, a shared kitchen space for growing food-based businesses.**

*Jean Nagy / Boston.com*

# How a Rock Musician from China Brought Uyghur Food to Boston

March 20, 2015 / BY [BRENT CRANE](#)



Payzulla Polat doesn't want to talk about politics. And who can blame him? If his homeland of Xinjiang—a massive frontier province in northwest China—is ever in the news, it's for terrorist attacks and human rights violations. He prefers to talk about music and food.

The 33-year-old Boston resident is the owner of [Uyghur Kitchen](#), the only **Uyghur food truck in America**. Uyghurs (pronounced *wee-gur*) are a Turkic, mostly Muslim ethnic minority in China, but the dominant ethnic group in Xinjiang. To say that they don't get along well with the Chinese government would be an understatement.

The Uyghurs are among the world's most persecuted minorities. Many of them desire an independent state, though they might not say it to your face; security forces in China regularly imprison outspoken Uyghurs, oftentimes on baseless charges of "separatism" and "extremism." But Polat doesn't have any apparent political agenda. He has a brand-new food truck and a chalkboard menu offering rice pilaf dishes, kebabs, and chicken and lamb wraps filled with tomato, onions, lettuce, and yogurt sauce. It's a small slice of home in a place nothing like it.

The musician-turned-food-trucker sees similarities between his two trades. "It's the same thing. When you mix a song, you put in reverb, delay, EQ, compression, whatever; it's just like you put salt and pepper on food. If you put in too much, that's gonna ruin the whole thing. And if the tune itself is good, you don't need to put anything on it, you know?"

Polat also sees himself as a cultural ambassador. "A lot of people are getting to know Uyghurs through my food. They didn't know us before," he says, "Most of the time they pronounce Uyghur 'yogurt.'"

» Home / LIFESTYLE / Eats / COMMON ROOM: MASSIVE DORCHESTER CULINARY INCUBATOR FOCUSES ON JOB CREATION, WOMEN, AND MINORITIES

## COMMON ROOM: MASSIVE DORCHESTER CULINARY INCUBATOR FOCUSES ON JOB CREATION, WOMEN, AND MINORITIES

September 11, 2015 By DAN MCCARTHY — Leave a Comment

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Everyone these days seems to have that one friend or family member with an idea for a new start-up food business capitalizing on the recent DIY nature of the food truck, pop-up, and pushcart explosion in the Hub over recent years.

Some of those ideas come to fruition. Others don't. And by and large, swaying the outcome one way or the other typically comes down to training, industry knowledge, and simply having a place to pull all the aspects together with the intent to not be a flash in the pan, but rather a functioning and sustainable business. And that's where Jennifer Faigel comes in.

"How do we help people start and grow small businesses, especially started by minority women, immigrants, veterans, and low-income [families]?" says Faigel while talking about the problem that Commonwealth Kitchen has set out to solve. "And create full-time, sustainable, permanent jobs in the community. Fundamentally, it was about thinking what we could do to be a job generator."



The proof in the non-profit job-creation pudding is more than ample. As co-founder of Commonwealth Kitchen (previously named CropCircle Kitchen until a recent rebranding), Faigel oversees 14 food truck projects and more than 50 culinary businesses working between two kitchens in the sprawling 36,000-square-foot Dorchester warehouse, commissary kitchen, and storage and manufacturing facility that employs almost 150 full- and part-time people, all of which are around 80 percent local minority- or

women-owned projects. But after graduating several businesses from different stages of development at the original incubator in Jamaica Plain (see: Roxy's Grilled Cheese, Clover Food Lab) Faigel realized that the project had legs, and needed a bigger space.

So around 2011-2012, Faigel set eyes on the old Pearl hot dog factory in Dorchester, now home to Commonwealth Kitchen. Another business was vying for the 2-acre real estate space with plans to buy the building, tear it down, and turn it into affordable housing. Until, that is, neighbors cried out for much-needed jobs over housing. Seeing demand and need, and that the complex is essentially a big refrigerator with loading docks and floor drains (read: good bones), it came down to getting the funding for a costly upgrade and overhaul of the space to the tune of 15 million in investment from a variety of sources, including landing a large portion of it via the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) under the Menino administration.

"They saw a job creation thing," says Faigel. "The job story is the piece that got it for us. Some of grants was all about creating permanent jobs for low-income people. There are nonprofits around [the] country that do incubators on food, but mostly they're about taking your mom's recipe or building confidence and selling yourself. Our model is much more about building real businesses and getting you to a scale to hire people, move out of here, graduate, and keep going."

On average, new businesses come in for a three-to-five-year term (they've just graduated two businesses in last few months), and according to Faigel, in 2015 Commonwealth Kitchen will be a 1.3-million-dollar-a-year organization, while only two years ago they capped at about 350k. That jump is due in part to the new influx of businesses using the commissary side of things they opened a year ago.



Jubilee Juice-w. Photo by Dan McCarthy

At present, the commissary side supports product manufacturing and storage for local outfits like Nola's Fresh Foods Salsa, Alex's Ugly Sauce, Noodle Lab, and Red Apple Farms (both are part of the new Boston Public Market), and infused tea- and juice-makers Jubilee Juice. Additionally, Mei Mei Street Kitchen—which had no previous relationship with Commonwealth Kitchen—has approached the commissary side to help scale, bottle, and sell its salad dressings and marinades for retail. But all this love for startups, mom-and-pop shops wanting to move on from pushcart empanadas cooked out of their home kitchens, and all the rest doesn't mean it's a free-for-all. There's a vision here, and those entering the fray need to come ready and serious.

And that's a good thing.

"We won't let just anyone in," says Faigel. "We take it very seriously that once you're in the kitchen, you are here. So [our application] process is about support and advice, but it also weeds people out that aren't serious about this as a real job."

She adds: "We don't waste their time or ours. We want you to be a real business when you leave here."

COMMONWEALTH KITCHEN, 196 QUINCY ST., DORCHESTER, 617-522-7900.

COMMONWEALTHKITCHEN.ORG

# How a New Orleans native is building up her Boston salsa startup one jar at a time

**Feb. 17, 2015**

By David Harris/Boston Business Journal

New Orleans native Sherie Grillon always knew that one day she would create her own food business. The 38-year-old moved to Boston 13 years ago from Austin, where she was attending the University of Texas School of Social Work and cooking in various restaurants.

And that eventually led to Nola's Fresh Foods, a three-year-old salsa startup that operates out of [CropCircle Kitchen](#), a food startup incubator in Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood. Nola's currently has eight employees and has two products: salsa fresca and fire-roasted corn and black bean salsa.

Nola's is currently available at Boston-area [Whole Foods](#) markets and various specialty stores. Grillon currently lives in Roslindale with her wife, Christine Grillon, and their one-year-old son, Paxton.





Equity Factor

# New Shared Kitchen in Boston Is About More Than Trendy Juices

BY MALCOLM BURNLEY | AUGUST 20, 2015



Blonde Beauchamp prepares her Haitian pickliz in Commonwealth Kitchen's Dorchester space. (Photo by Lucas Mulder)

The Boston neighborhood of Dorchester is six square miles, enough land to contain tense problems that could fill up a city in itself. Of all of Boston's impoverished residents, more than 20 percent live in Dorchester, 26,000 people by one recent estimate. And according to a study by the Massachusetts Housing Partnership in 2014, the neighborhood was the most embattled area of the city when it came to foreclosures, containing the four most distressed census tracts out of all 30 citywide.

Dorchester has been the locus of several government programs with an eye toward revitalization — including a defunct Empowerment Zone and a current Promise Zone. A couple years ago, one local blog — citing the neighborhood's diversity, local music scene and bicycling culture — insisted that "Dorchester is the new Brooklyn." And new community resources are opening, like a health and wellness center last year.

But arguably the most exciting project that's taken shape in Dorchester of late is happening inside an old hotdog factory: A new shared kitchen facility, run by nonprofit Commonwealth Kitchen, is part startup incubator, part hyperlocal employer and part business resource center. It's an economic engine for Dorchester that's aimed at fostering skilled jobs and small businesses in the surrounding community.


A \$15 million redevelopment of the old factory building — a collaborative effort between Commonwealth and Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation — was completed last year, with the help of a HUD grant that awarded \$20 million to Dorchester overall. All told, roughly 20,000 square feet was converted into kitchen space with equipment like fryolators and a blast chiller, and it's now home to a diverse group of 30 entrepreneurs and 140 workers. Jen Faigel, Commonwealth's executive director, says that 70 percent of the businesses in the Dorchester kitchen today are led by women or people of color.

Shared kitchens aren't new of course, but what differentiates Commonwealth — which has operated a second, smaller facility in Jamaica Plain since 2009 — is its expansion ambitions. "When we started, the first thing we did was look around the country for different models of shared kitchens," says Faigel. "What we're really focused on is businesses that can scale and grow."

While studying similar food-centric spaces, Faigel noticed that, as occupants, caterers and pushcart vendors were often a losing proposition. For one, those businesses can have a high turnover rate as tenants. Secondly, their potential to fuel job creation is limited. So Commonwealth focused on renting to entrepreneurs making products that could be sold wholesale or at farmers' markets — from ice cream to bagels to juices. Essentially, businesses that could expand several-fold over time.

Putting a premium on scalability gave rise to what Faigel calls the facility's "on demand" workforce. Employees there are paid to work for both in-house companies and outside ones. They might be roasting bananas for Commonwealth's ice cream company on Monday, cutting tomatoes for the salsa company on Tuesday, and doing contract work — like making apple crisp for a local apple farm — on Thursday and Friday.

For the workers — the majority of whom are hired from the immediate area in Roxbury and Dorchester — it's an attractive entry-level job, particularly in an area that has little industry. There's a diversity of skills training in the work, a consistent paycheck — the average wage is between \$12 and \$14 per hour, according to Faigel — and exposure to multiple small businesses that could potentially hire them down the road.

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Plus, rather than scraping together a prep crew for packing cookies two days a week, the small business owners can maximize their time in other pursuits. "We're feeding 800 people per week, and it's hard to scale up to that as a new business," says Cassandra Campbell, co-owner of the Fresh Food Generation truck, who uses the on-demand workers to make jerk sauce. "Having them easily get through 30 pounds of cabbage in an hour, when it would take our team two or three because we don't have the equipment or experience is pretty important."



Cassandra Campbell and Jackson Renshaw, co-owners of Fresh Food Generation

Plus, Campbell adds, "I can be happy knowing that Commonwealth Kitchen is using local hiring practices."

Like in many cities, sharing space is more economical for startups too. Commonwealth rents space for \$35 per hour, with additional fees for storage and parking. "I looked into my own space and realized that the cost was going to be astronomical," says Alex Bourgeois of Alex's Ugly Sauces. "To commit six figures to build out a space and sign a multi-year lease, with no idea whether the hot sauce was actually going to be successful or not wasn't feasible."

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He was successful. Having scaled up to more than 20,000 bottles of hot sauce per year (some Whole Foods carry the product), Bourgeois "graduated" from Commonwealth's Jamaica Plain location and is now a permanent tenant of commissary space at the Dorchester facility. (About half of the complex is available to rent by businesses outside the incubator.) And yet, Bourgeois still utilizes Commonwealth's on-demand workers to stem some 6,000 pounds of peppers during a 10-week span each year. Bourgeois could have relocated elsewhere, but his decision to stay connected with his former home is telling of the project's promise for Dorchester. "We don't want to be the annoying entrepreneurs who come in and spend our days working there, making our money and driving away," he says.

*The Equity Factor is made possible with the support of the Surdna Foundation.*

# The Backyard BBQ- UPGRADED

In 2011, Kai and Chris Grant began selling their exquisitely spiced jerk chicken—available chopped, whole, and in wings—from their Roxbury backyard on Saturdays.

Four years later, **Fort Hill Jerk Chicken's** birds can be ordered online for weekly pickup, and the couple plan to turn the first floor of their home into a full-fledged restaurant. [forthilljerkchicken.com](http://forthilljerkchicken.com).



## Jerk chicken gurus go big

Couple with locally legendary recipe seeks to expand to in-home restaurant

Eliza Dewey | 5/6/2015, 12:16 p.m.



Chris and Kai Grant of Roxbury ERIC POPP ESTEVEZ

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### Also of interest



From Food Trucks to Urban Farming – Boston's Locally grown food startups on the rise.



Bornshtein & Pearl Food Production Center expected to create 150 jobs.

Self-described "jerk-loving duo" Chris and Kai Grant of Roxbury knew a good thing when they had it.

Eighteen years ago, the couple scored a secret jerk chicken recipe from Chris's mother and began cooking the Jamaican dish for family and neighborhood gatherings. Soon, their chicken was legendary among neighbors, inspiring them to take their product to market. After conducting market research and building their customer base, they launched Fort Hill Jerk Chicken LLC in 2011.



Kai Grant

Chicken offerings from Fort Hill Jerk Chicken, a Roxbury family-owned take-out service. FHJC seeks to expand to a full restaurant by next spring.

Now the Grants, who have been married for 23 years and have four children, are looking to the next frontier. They have been working for the past four years on a plan to open a full service restaurant in their home in Fort Hill by spring 2016.

Kai says the couple envisions the project as a trailblazer in the neighborhood that will help encourage the development of a more vibrant local restaurant scene.

"We want to be the watering hole that Roxbury doesn't have," says Kai. "We want to kick it off...[But] we don't want it to be the only game in town. We would actually prefer to

have multiple places around. We want to add to the landscape."

# BostInno

*The view from inside **Boston***



## CropCircle Kitchen

2014 Winner: Dining & Retail



In December, 2014 CropCircle Kitchen was selected from amongst 2,000+ nominations as one of BostInno's 50 most incendiary and game-changing companies and organizations across 9 sectors.



Click to Print Now

## Food business incubator CropCircle Kitchen heats up for the summer (BBJ photo gallery)

Mar 26, 2015, 2:40pm EDT | **UPDATED:** Mar 27, 2015, 8:40am EDT



**Sara Castellanos**

Technology Editor- *Boston Business Journal*

Email | Twitter | Google+

The recently-opened Dorchester outpost of CropCircle Kitchen is preparing for an influx of workers over the busy summer season, as the food business incubator sees significant growth.

At its peak this summer, when the Massachusetts-based food trucks are out and in full-force, CropCircle Kitchen's two locations will be home to 45 food-related businesses employing about 150 people, said Jen Faigel, executive

director.

The Dorchester outpost is home to about 25 of those businesses including Jubali Juice, Fresh Food Generation, Apotheker's Chocolates and Fort Hill Jerk Chicken.

"We're on a crazy growth trajectory," Faigel said.

At its peak, before the Dorchester facility opened, the nonprofit's original facility in Jamaica Plain had an organizational budget of \$300,000 and a staff of two full-time employees, with 20 food-related businesses.

Now, CropCircle Kitchen's budget is \$1.2 million, and it has about 45 businesses and a staff of 10, with up to four more employees being hired at the end of the year.

The 36,000-square-foot Dorchester facility was formerly the site of Pearl hot dog factory, and officially opened its doors last September. The facility is a larger extension of the Jamaica Plain location, founded in 2009, which lacked certain cooking equipment and frozen storage space that food startups desperately need in order to scale.

"Pretty quickly, we realized that if we didn't have a different kinds of facilities, that these businesses weren't ever going to make it," Faigel said.

Income for the nonprofit is generated through a combination of local, state and federal grants and revenue from entrepreneurs renting storage and kitchen space, and contract work at CropCircle's commissary, or commercial, kitchen.



Sara Castellanos

A look inside CropCircle Kitchen's 36,000-square-foot Dorchester facility.

## Tia's Cakes & Pastries - baking business success

Entrepreneur leaves marketing to open baking startup

Martin Desmarais | 7/22/2015, 11:48 a.m.



Tia's Cakes & Pastries. LUCAS MULDER



260



3



5

Also of interest

Tia Jackson has been working her recipe for success with Tia's Cakes & Pastries for a couple of years, but now her small business is really starting to rise.

# Food business incubator CropCircle Kitchen heats up for the summer

**March 26, 2015**

By Sara Castellanos

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# WALL STREET JOURNAL

F. MARTIN RAMIN  
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



## Relish the Heat

You'll find a jar of pikliz on most every Haitian table, with good reason: This fiery relish of cabbage, carrots, onion and Scotch bonnet peppers makes even the blandest of dishes come alive. Imagine what it could do for the hot dogs and burgers at your next cookout.

**Boston-based pikliz producer The Craic & Blonde** makes an exemplary iteration with habaneros (Scotch bonnets' close cousins), in both hot and mild styles- both of which deliver plenty of kick. Haitian Pikliz: \$12 for two 5.9 ounce jars; [thecraicandblonde.com](http://thecraicandblonde.com)  
June 19, 2015





**modern farmer**

FARM. FOOD. LIFE.

## The Farm-to-Street Revolution Is Almost Here

By Meaghan Agnew on October 28, 2014



Food trucks might deal in gourmet grilled cheeses, Korean-Mexican fusion and chocolate-covered bacon, **but rare is the truck that also traffics in food justice.**

Luckily, Cassandra Campbell and Jackson Renshaw have added “activism” to the chalkboard menu. The founders of Boston-based [Fresh Food Generation](#) aim to bring culturally appropriate, sustainable meals to lower-income areas of the city that typically lack for healthy food options.

The partnership was written in the adolescent stars. The duo met as high schoolers at [The Food Project](#), a nonprofit that brings together teens from diverse backgrounds to assist in sustainable food production. For both, it was a life-altering experience. The mission of Fresh Food Generation is to bring culturally appropriate, sustainable meals to lower-income areas of the city.

“I was working downtown, and the food truck scene was really popular,” Campbell recalls. But living in Roxbury, “I realized that my food options were very limited and that I was traveling to other neighborhoods to get good food.” Creative eating options, mobile kitchens ... the Fresh Food Generation seed was planted. Campbell then approached old friend Renshaw with the idea, and the rolling revolution began.

**“The idea is that the farm-to-plate movement is for everyone,”**  
Campbell says. “It’s not just this thing that only people with money can afford.”

BOSTON  
**Herald**



**BREWING UP A TREAT:** Heather Yunger from Top Shelf Cookies works with cookie dough made with a Samuel Adams Cold Snap beer reduction. **March 2, 2015**

**Baking with Beer:**  
Hub cooks craft treats good for what ales you.

# What they all have in common: A love of food

## Incubator.

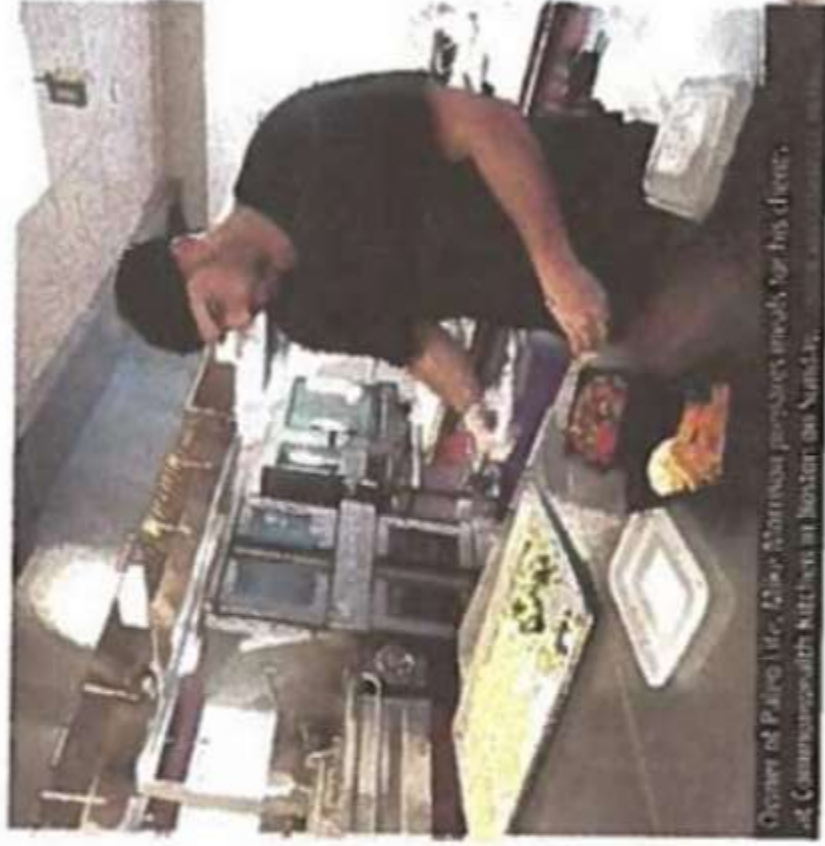
Commonwealth Kitchen provides food entrepreneurs with a home in Jamaica Plain.

Massachusetts history and the history of food are intricately linked. From Boston baked beans to Toll House cookies and Fig Newtons to Parker House rolls, many of the country's favorites came from our kitchens.

As the food industry became more industrialized, many independent manufacturers were squeezed out. Now, one of their former factories has been repurposed for the meal-minded masses.

Having outgrown their original home in Jamaica Plain, Commonwealth Kitchen has expanded its food business incubator into the 36,000-square-foot former home of Bornstein & Pearl Provision Co. (creator of those amazing hot dogs that are another Boston-born classic). On July 11, they will be hosting a food festival at their Dorchester location.

Overseen by longtime Community Servings chef Brad Stevens and veteran not-for-profit pro Jen Faigel, the facility hosts some of the area's most popular up-and-



Owner of Paleo Me, Steve Morrison prepares meals for his clients at Commonwealth Kitchen in Boston's South End.

coming establishments and those who are about to be.

"Over the past two years, we've tripled our kitchen space, and grown from a budget of \$300,000 in 2013 to \$1.3 million," Faigel said.

Among the kitchen's members are Clover Food Lab, McCrea's Candies, Roxy's Grilled Cheese, BATCH Ice Cream (one of former Mayor Thomas Menino's favorites), Boston Police's Lyndigo Spice and the Bayou-bred NOLA's Fresh Foods.

In addition to being an incubator for fledgling chefs,

the kitchen is also a test site for the commonwealth's composting pilot, a warehouse and a space where people can share expenses and ideas.

"I have access to mixers that are nearly 20 times the size mixer I have at home," said Heather of Top Shelf Cookies, noting that the kitchen oven can bake 700 cookies at a time. "That's equipment I couldn't have afforded on my own."

MATTHEW ROBINSON

@MetroBOS  
letters@metro.us

# They Pedal Meals to Your Door

The MBTA could take lessons from Laurel Valchuis, founder — and chief delivery person — of **al FreshCo, a meal-kit service focusing on locally grown produce.**

Monday is delivery day, and Valchuis's mode of transportation is a custom-made trike, equipped with a cooler box. Yet despite winter's wretched weather, Valchuis did not miss a single delivery to her 20-mile customer base, all of this on the trike, or resorting to alternative modes of transportation, from cross-country skis to a mountain bike, and even at times relying on the T. At the end of the day every Monday, more than 150 ready-to-cook meal packets were delivered to homes in the area.

Al FreshCo offers a frequently changing menu of vegetarian dishes that can be on the table in 30 minutes. All the ingredients arrive ready to go straight into a pot or pan.

Now there's really no excuse not to eat your veggies. They're right on your doorstep — washed and prepped and ready for supper.



# The IMPROPER BOSTONIAN

FEATURES | COLUMNS | **GOING OUT** | BLOGS | BOSTON'S BEST | PICS

## Going Out

Good Eats

### Exodus Arrives



They don't have a phone number or a storefront yet, but Exodus Bagels still sell out fast. Jamaica Plain native and startup bagelsmith Adam Hirsch rolls, boils and bakes six varieties at CropCircle Kitchen until they're deeply tanned, crackly on the outside and softly chewy within: New York-inspired but with character all their own. The seasonings are liberal (go for salt or seeded), and the lox-scallion and Sriracha cream cheeses are particularly good. Check Twitter and Facebook for batch updates and photos, as well as the latest pop-up location.

Bagels, \$2-\$3 (\$1 for cream cheese) from Exodus Bagels. [exodusbagels.com](http://exodusbagels.com)



# FreshFood Generation, bringing healthy lunch options to Dudley Square, July 14, 2015



The New York Times

## Start-Ups Rise to Close a Gap for Farmers

By Stephanie Strom  
December 30, 2014



*Cassandra Campbell and Jackson Renshaw  
from Fresh Food Generation*