Start a food business in Santa Cruz County

County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, Environmental Health Division (Consumer Protection Program)

Phone (831) 454-2022. https://scceh.com/NewHome/Programs/ConsumerProtection/Food.aspx

What's different in Santa Cruz County

- Home kitchens (MEHKO) are permitted here.

Open a restaurant, step by step

In order. Do them top to bottom.

- [ ] **1. Get your plans approved before you build or remodel**
  California law: plans go to the county or city first, and work starts only after they approve them.
  Who: County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, Environmental Health Division (Consumer Protection Program). Email ConsumerPlanCheck@santacruzcountyca.gov.
  https://scceh.com/NewHome/Programs/ConsumerProtection/Food/FixedFoodFacilitiesPlanReviewChangeofOwnership.aspx.
  Bring: Plans drawn to scale; Equipment and finish specifications.
  When: Before you build or remodel.
  Source: HSC 114380(a).
  https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=114380

- [ ] **2. Get a seller's permit from CDTFA (free)**
  You sell food and drinks, so the state tax agency needs to know you. The permit costs nothing.
  Who: California Department of Tax and Fee Administration (CDTFA). Phone 1-800-400-7115.
  Source: CDTFA Publication 73. https://www.cdtfa.ca.gov/services/registration.htm

- [ ] **3. Get your city or county business license**
  Cities license businesses inside city limits; the county does in unincorporated areas. We haven't read your city's rule.
  Confirm with your city hall (or the county, outside city limits). Phone (831) 454-2022.

- [ ] **4. Get your health permit**
  California law: a food business can't open without a valid health permit from the county or city.
  Who: County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, Environmental Health Division (Consumer Protection Program). No county page found; the state food program handles this. Phone (831) 454-2022.
  When: Before you open.
  Source: HSC 114381(a).
  https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=114381

- [ ] **5. Fire and building sign-off**
  Cooking hoods, fire extinguishers and occupancy are your fire marshal's and building department's. We haven't read your city's rule.
  Confirm with your city hall (or the county, outside city limits). Phone (831) 454-2022.

- [ ] **6. If you'll serve alcohol: an ABC license, and RBS training for servers**
  Alcohol needs a license from the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (for a restaurant, often type 41 or 47). Every server and their manager is RBS-certified within 60 days of starting.
  Who: California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC), your district office.
  Source: ABC license types; ABC Responsible Beverage Service. https://www.abc.ca.gov/education/rbs/

- [ ] **7. Your opening inspection**
  The county or city inspects before (or right after) the permit. Ask them how to book it.
  Confirm with County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, Environmental Health Division (Consumer Protection Program). Phone (831) 454-2022.

- [ ] **8. Get a certified food protection manager**
  California law: at least one owner or employee is certified. A new place has 60 days; the certificate lasts 5 years.
  Who: An ANSI-accredited food protection manager exam.
  When: Within 60 days.
  Source: HSC 113947.1, 113947.3.
  https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=113947.1

- [ ] **9. Put up the required signs**
  California law: the permit where customers see it, a handwashing sign at every hand sink, a notice that your latest inspection report is here, and "No smoking" at each entrance.
  Who: You.
  Source: HSC 114381(e), 113953.5, 113725.1; Labor Code 6404.5.
  https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=114381

- [ ] **10. Post the Prop 65 food warning (10 or more employees)**
  California law: a business with 10 or more employees warns customers about chemicals in some foods. Use an 8½ × 11 sign at each entrance, a 5 × 5 sign at each register, or the warning on your menu. Serving alcohol adds the alcohol warning.
  Who: You.
  Source: 27 CCR 25607.5, 25607.6, 25607.3; HSC 25249.11(b).
  https://oehha.ca.gov/sites/default/files/media/2025-04/OEHHA%20P65%20Regulations%20042025_1.pdf

- [ ] **11. Food handler cards for your team**
  California law: each food handler gets a California Food Handler Card within 30 days of starting. You pay for the course and the time.
  Who: An ANSI-accredited food handler course.
  When: Within 30 days.
  Source: HSC 113948(a); SB 476.
  https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=113948

Open a coffee shop, step by step

- [ ] **1. Get your plans approved before you build or remodel**
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  Who: County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, Environmental Health Division (Consumer Protection Program). Email ConsumerPlanCheck@santacruzcountyca.gov.
  https://scceh.com/NewHome/Programs/ConsumerProtection/Food/FixedFoodFacilitiesPlanReviewChangeofOwnership.aspx.
  Bring: Plans drawn to scale; Equipment and finish specifications.
  When: Before you build or remodel.
  Source: HSC 114380(a).
  https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=114380

- [ ] **2. Get a seller's permit from CDTFA (free)**
  You sell food and drinks, so the state tax agency needs to know you. The permit costs nothing.
  Who: California Department of Tax and Fee Administration (CDTFA). Phone 1-800-400-7115.
  Source: CDTFA Publication 73. https://www.cdtfa.ca.gov/services/registration.htm

- [ ] **3. Get your city or county business license**
  Cities license businesses inside city limits; the county does in unincorporated areas. We haven't read your city's rule.
  Confirm with your city hall (or the county, outside city limits). Phone (831) 454-2022.

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  California law: a food business can't open without a valid health permit from the county or city.
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  When: Before you open.

Source: HSC 114381(a).
https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=114381

- [ ] **5. Fire and building sign-off**
  Cooking hoods, fire extinguishers and occupancy are your fire marshal's and building department's. We haven't read your city's rule.
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  Alcohol needs a license from the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (for a restaurant, often type 41 or 47). Every server and their manager is RBS-certified within 60 days of starting.
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- [ ] **8. Get a certified food protection manager**
  California law: at least one owner or employee is certified. A new place has 60 days; the certificate lasts 5 years.
  Who: An ANSI-accredited food protection manager exam.
  When: Within 60 days.
  Source: HSC 113947.1, 113947.3.
  https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=113947.1

- [ ] **9. Put up the required signs**
  California law: the permit where customers see it, a handwashing sign at every hand sink, a notice that your latest inspection report is here, and "No smoking" at each entrance.
  Who: You.
  Source: HSC 114381(e), 113953.5, 113725.1; Labor Code 6404.5.
  https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=114381

- [ ] **10. Post the Prop 65 food warning (10 or more employees)**
  California law: a business with 10 or more employees warns customers about chemicals in some foods. Use an 8½ × 11 sign at each entrance, a 5 × 5 sign at each register, or the warning on your menu. Serving alcohol adds the alcohol warning.
  Who: You.
  Source: 27 CCR 25607.5, 25607.6, 25607.3; HSC 25249.11(b).
  https://oehha.ca.gov/sites/default/files/media/2025-04/OEHHA%20P65%20Regulations%20042025_1.pdf

- [ ] **11. Food handler cards for your team**
  California law: each food handler gets a California Food Handler Card within 30 days of starting. You pay for the course and the time.
  Who: An ANSI-accredited food handler course.
  When: Within 30 days.
  Source: HSC 113948(a); SB 476.
  https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=113948

Open a food truck, step by step

- [ ] **1. Get your plans approved before you build or remodel**
  California law: plans go to the county or city first, and work starts only after they approve them.
  Who: County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, Environmental Health Division (Consumer Protection Program). Email ConsumerPlanCheck@santacruzcountyca.gov.
  https://scceh.com/NewHome/Programs/ConsumerProtection/Food/FixedFoodFacilitiesPlanReviewChangeofOwnership.aspx.
  Bring: Plans drawn to scale; Equipment and finish specifications.

When: Before you build or remodel.
Source: HSC 114380(a).
https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=114380

- [ ] **2. Get a seller's permit from CDTFA (free)**
You sell food and drinks, so the state tax agency needs to know you. The permit costs nothing.
Who: California Department of Tax and Fee Administration (CDTFA). Phone 1-800-400-7115.
Source: CDTFA Publication 73. https://www.cdtfa.ca.gov/services/registration.htm

- [ ] **3. Get your city or county business license**
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Confirm with your city hall (or the county, outside city limits). Phone (831) 454-2022.

- [ ] **4. Line up your commissary**
California law: a food truck works out of a commissary or another approved place, and is cleaned and serviced there every day it runs.
Who: County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, Environmental Health Division (Consumer Protection Program). Email ConsumerPlanCheck@santacruzcountyca.gov.
https://scceh.com/NewHome/Programs/ConsumerProtection/Food/MobileFoodFacilityPlanReview.aspx.
Source: HSC 114295, 114297.
https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=114295

- [ ] **5. Get your mobile food facility permit**
California law: no food business, truck included, opens without a valid permit from the county or city.
Who: County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, Environmental Health Division (Consumer Protection Program). No county page found; the state food program handles this. Phone (831) 454-2022.
When: Before you open.
Source: HSC 114381(a).
https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=114381

- [ ] **6. Fire and building sign-off**
Cooking hoods, fire extinguishers and occupancy are your fire marshal's and building department's. We haven't read your city's rule.
Confirm with your city hall (or the county, outside city limits). Phone (831) 454-2022.

- [ ] **7. Your opening inspection**
The county or city inspects before (or right after) the permit. Ask them how to book it.
Confirm with County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, Environmental Health Division (Consumer Protection Program). Phone (831) 454-2022.

- [ ] **8. Get a certified food protection manager**
California law: at least one owner or employee is certified. A new place has 60 days; the certificate lasts 5 years.
Who: An ANSI-accredited food protection manager exam.
When: Within 60 days.
Source: HSC 113947.1, 113947.3.
https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=113947.1

- [ ] **9. Put up the required signs**
California law: the permit where customers see it, a handwashing sign at every hand sink, a notice that your latest inspection report is here, and "No smoking" at each entrance.
Who: You.
Source: HSC 114381(e), 113953.5, 113725.1; Labor Code 6404.5.
https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=114381

- [ ] **10. Post the Prop 65 food warning (10 or more employees)**
  California law: a business with 10 or more employees warns customers about chemicals in some foods. Use an 8½ × 11 sign at each entrance, a 5 × 5 sign at each register, or the warning on your menu. Serving alcohol adds the alcohol warning.
  Who: You.
  Source: 27 CCR 25607.5, 25607.6, 25607.3; HSC 25249.11(b).
  https://oehha.ca.gov/sites/default/files/media/2025-04/OEHHA%20P65%20Regulations%20042025_1.pdf

- [ ] **11. Food handler cards for your team**
  California law: each food handler gets a California Food Handler Card within 30 days of starting. You pay for the course and the time.
  Who: An ANSI-accredited food handler course.
  When: Within 30 days.
  Source: HSC 113948(a); SB 476.
  https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=113948

Open an event booth, step by step

- [ ] **1. Get a seller's permit from CDTFA (free)**
  You sell food and drinks, so the state tax agency needs to know you. The permit costs nothing.
  Who: California Department of Tax and Fee Administration (CDTFA). Phone 1-800-400-7115.
  Source: CDTFA Publication 73. https://www.cdtfa.ca.gov/services/registration.htm

- [ ] **2. Get your city or county business license**
  Cities license businesses inside city limits; the county does in unincorporated areas. We haven't read your city's rule.
  Confirm with your city hall (or the county, outside city limits). Phone (831) 454-2022.

- [ ] **3. Get a temporary food facility permit for the event**
  California law: a booth at a community event (up to 25 days in any 90) needs a permit. Each county sets how far ahead to apply.
  Who: County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, Environmental Health Division (Consumer Protection Program). Email EnvironmentalHealth@santacruzcountyca.gov.
  https://scceh.com/NewHome/Programs/ConsumerProtection/Food/CommunityEvents.aspx. 701 Ocean St., Room 312, Santa Cruz, CA 95060. Monday through Thursday 8AM-12PM (closed holidays).
  When: Before the event.
  Source: HSC 113755, 114381.
  https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=113755

- [ ] **4. Put up the required signs**
  California law: the permit where customers see it, a handwashing sign at every hand sink, a notice that your latest inspection report is here, and "No smoking" at each entrance.
  Who: You.
  Source: HSC 114381(e), 113953.5, 113725.1; Labor Code 6404.5.
  https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=114381

- [ ] **5. Post the Prop 65 food warning (10 or more employees)**
  California law: a business with 10 or more employees warns customers about chemicals in some foods. Use an 8½ × 11 sign at each entrance, a 5 × 5 sign at each register, or the warning on your menu. Serving alcohol adds the alcohol warning.
  Who: You.
  Source: 27 CCR 25607.5, 25607.6, 25607.3; HSC 25249.11(b).
  https://oehha.ca.gov/sites/default/files/media/2025-04/OEHHA%20P65%20Regulations%20042025_1.pdf

- [ ] **6. Food handler cards for your team**
  California law: each food handler gets a California Food Handler Card within 30 days of starting. You pay for the course and the time.
  Who: An ANSI-accredited food handler course.
  When: Within 30 days.
  Source: HSC 113948(a); SB 476.
  https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=113948

Open a home kitchen (MEHKO), step by step

- [ ] **1. Get a seller's permit from CDTFA (free)**
  You sell food and drinks, so the state tax agency needs to know you. The permit costs nothing.
  Who: California Department of Tax and Fee Administration (CDTFA). Phone 1-800-400-7115.
  Source: CDTFA Publication 73. https://www.cdtfa.ca.gov/services/registration.htm

- [ ] **2. Get your home kitchen (MEHKO) permit**
  Only where your county or city has said yes. Up to 30 meals a day and 90 a week, and up to $110,442 a year (2026).
  Who: County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, Environmental Health Division (Consumer Protection Program).
  https://scceh.com/NewHome/Programs/ConsumerProtection/Food/MicroenterpriseHomeKitchenOperations(MEHKO).aspx.
  When: Before you open.
  Source: HSC 114367, 113825.
  https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=114367

- [ ] **3. Put up the required signs**
  California law: the permit where customers see it, a handwashing sign at every hand sink, a notice that your latest inspection report is here, and "No smoking" at each entrance.
  Who: You.
  Source: HSC 114381(e), 113953.5, 113725.1; Labor Code 6404.5.
  https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=HSC&sectionNum=114381

- [ ] **4. Post the Prop 65 food warning (10 or more employees)**
  California law: a business with 10 or more employees warns customers about chemicals in some foods. Use an 8½ × 11 sign at each entrance, a 5 × 5 sign at each register, or the warning on your menu. Serving alcohol adds the alcohol warning.
  Who: You.
  Source: 27 CCR 25607.5, 25607.6, 25607.3; HSC 25249.11(b).
  https://oehha.ca.gov/sites/default/files/media/2025-04/OEHHA%20P65%20Regulations%20042025_1.pdf

Start a cottage food business, step by step

- [ ] **1. Register your cottage food operation (Class A) or get its permit (Class B)**
  A cottage food operation registers (Class A, direct sales) or gets a permit (Class B, also through stores and restaurants) with the local agency before it sells. Current yearly sales caps: $75,000 for Class A, $150,000 for Class B.
  Who: Your county or city environmental health agency. County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, Environmental Health Division (Consumer Protection Program).
  https://scceh.com/NewHome/Programs/ConsumerProtection/Food/MicroenterpriseHomeKitchenOperations(MEHKO).aspx.
  Source: HSC 114365; CDPH Cottage Food Operations page.
  https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CEH/DFDCS/Pages/FDBPrograms/FoodSafetyProgram/CottageFoodOperations.aspx

- [ ] **2. Get a seller's permit from CDTFA (free)**
  You sell food and drinks, so the state tax agency needs to know you. The permit costs nothing.
  Who: California Department of Tax and Fee Administration (CDTFA). Phone 1-800-400-7115.
  Source: CDTFA Publication 73. https://www.cdtfa.ca.gov/services/registration.htm

☐ **3. Get your city or county business license**

Cities license businesses inside city limits; the county does in unincorporated areas. We haven't read your city's rule.

Confirm with your city hall (or the county, outside city limits). Phone (831) 454-2022.

Santa Cruz County at a glance

- Inspection scoring: No grade or placard found
- Home kitchens (MEHKO): Yes, permitted here.
- Food handler card: California Food Handler Card, within 30 days of hire, valid 3 years (an ANSI-accredited course).
- Prop 65 food warning: A Prop 65 food warning: an 8½ × 11 sign (28-point type) at each public entrance, OR a 5 × 5 sign (20-point) at each register, OR the warning on your menu. In English and any other language your signs or menu use.

Sources checked October 2, 2026. Informational only, not legal advice. Confirm with County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency, Environmental Health Division (Consumer Protection Program) before you spend money.

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