



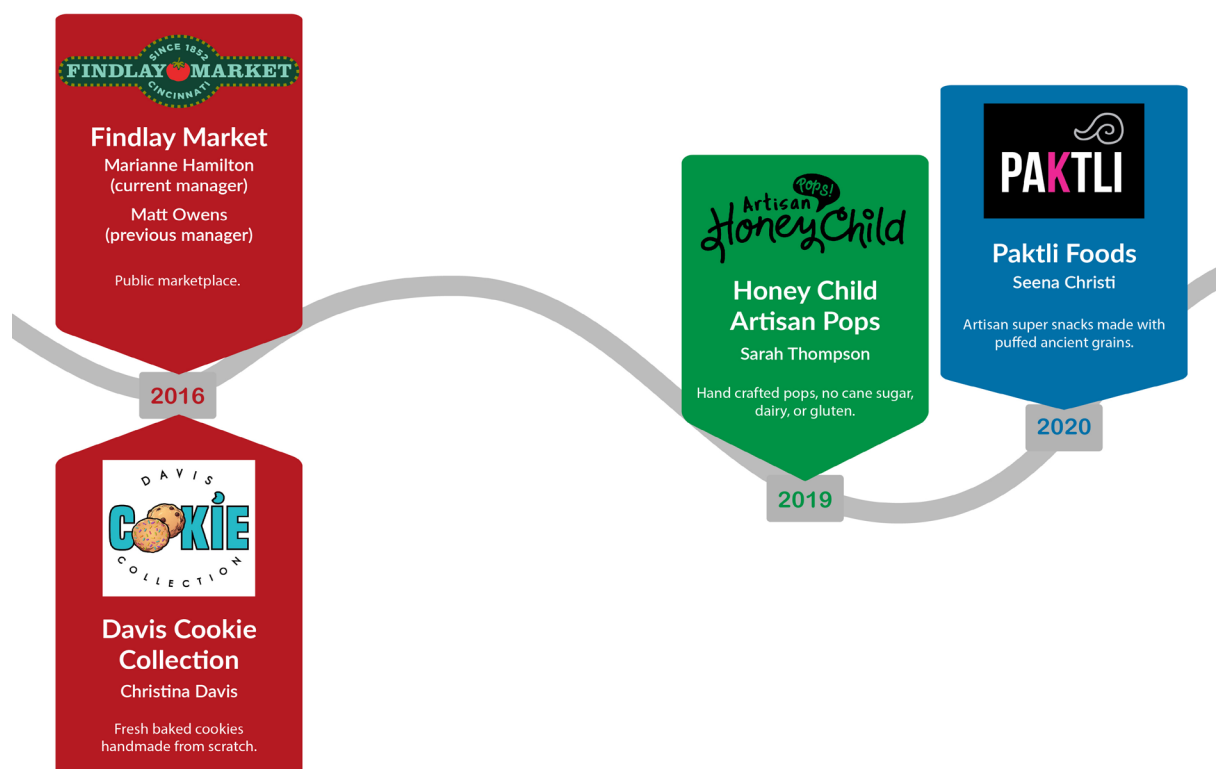
Findlay Kitchen

a case study



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Timeline



Introduction

Officially defined as “licensed commercial spaces that provide a pathway for food entrepreneurs to launch and grow their businesses¹,” shared kitchens are a relatively new business development strategy. Despite this being a newly emerging sector, communities across the U.S. have adopted this strategy to enable diverse local food businesses to produce, store, and sell their products through a wide range of channels.

As a developing and dynamic sector of local and regional food systems, shared kitchens provide a valuable resource to communities seeking to address potential barriers to business development, including access to facilities and capital. A 2019 survey² of 180 food business owners operating out of shared kitchens found that 50% of kitchen respondents were established within the last five years, and another 28% were established within the last 5-9 years. Additionally, more than half of the kitchens surveyed responded that their primary goal for using shared kitchens was to “assist early-growth businesses” in their communities. Chefs, caterers, food truck operators, bakers, value-added producers and packaged food and beverage makers are among the food business owners who utilize shared kitchens.

To learn more about the dynamics of businesses using shared kitchens, the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, Colorado State University, and the Food Corridor collaborated in 2021 to compile data about the role of shared kitchens in communities across the U.S. and the food business owners operating out of these facilities. This information is now available through a series of research briefs and case studies published by the USDA.

Findlay Kitchen: Putting Its Vision into Action

Findlay Kitchen is a non-profit food business incubator, located in the heart of the historic Findlay Market District in Cincinnati, Ohio. Findlay Kitchen supports food entrepreneurs looking to start, grow, and scale their business, by providing affordable access to 14 licensed commercial kitchens, commercial-grade kitchen equipment, ample storage space, and business support services. As a food business incubator, Findlay Kitchen, partners with external programs and organizations to provide the necessary training, mentorship, and resources to aid business growth. They provide multiple types of business support services, including access to exclusive sales channels and opportunities not common among shared kitchens, all while helping local food entrepreneurs bring healthy, locally grown and/or produced food in their region to their community.

More than 60 businesses currently operate out of Findlay Kitchen and many more came before them. There are three outstanding businesses affiliated with Findlay Kitchen – Paktli Foods, Honey Child Artisan Pops, and Davis Cookie Collective. These businesses have shared their stories and journeys within and beyond Findlay Kitchen to showcase the relationship they have with the kitchen, its role in their business development, and the value they found in its incubator services.

Building a Place for Innovation

Findlay Kitchen is in the heart of the historical Findlay Market District in Cincinnati, Ohio. Findlay Kitchen Business Manager Matt Owens shared that when the kitchen was initially conceived, there was nothing like it in the city. With a growing population of people living in the city, they saw a need to develop one. They began by working with several kitchens throughout the country to learn from their experiences and business structures. They developed the vision of Findlay Kitchen from this new knowledge.

The Findlay Kitchen members benefit from an array of facility resources that are included with their membership. The kitchen recognizes potential barriers for entry, and purposefully keeps costs and the monthly hours required of members to rent minimal to allow starting a food business to be more accessible to community members. Owens says, "All in, businesses can get started for less than \$1,000." According to Matt, even with this low threshold for entry, the most common needs of kitchen members are financial assistance and specialized equipment. In terms of equipment, each kitchen can be set up somewhat differently to fit the needs of the members with most equipment on movable shelves to provide the ability to move commercial grade equipment and provide maximum flexibility. There is also the ability to reserve more specialized pieces (e.g. steam kettle, fryer, food processor). Additionally, Findlay Kitchen provides numerous business support services including business planning, marketing support and food safety trainings. As Findlay Kitchen continues to amass partnerships with business organizations across the city, they continuously add more resources for their members.

Members of Findlay Kitchen utilize many of these resources and business incubator services as they begin their dream. According to Seena Christi, the Founder of Paktli Foods, the most important thing that Findlay Kitchen gave her was a platform to be able to promote in a gradual timeline with a comfortable approach. Findlay Kitchen always welcomed her, talked to her about opportunities, and provided her a space to learn and grow her business at her own pace. Seena was a kitchen member for four months, utilizing business services provided by the kitchen, before she even started using the kitchen equipment and making her product.

Christina Davis, Co-Founder of Davis Cookie Collection, said the most important resource Findlay Kitchen gave her was trade knowledge and the ability to learn and understand the equipment and space needs of her business. When Christina bought her own storefront, she knew exactly what equipment to buy and what size facility she needed because of her experience at Findlay Kitchen.

Sarah Thompson, Founder of Honey Child Artisan Pops, said that the most important thing Findlay Kitchen offered her to help her business was access to the physical space, equipment, and the ability to scale up, as well as the softer skills gained from mentorship and business support.

What Findlay Provides

Equipment

- Convection and Conventional Ovens
- Combi-ovens
- Roll-In Rack Oven
- Six-Burner Gas Ranges
- Induction Cooktops
- Tilt Skillet
- Griddle
- Fryer Battery
- Steam Jacketed Kettle
- 60 Qt, 20 Qt, and 5 Qt Mixers
- Dough Roller/Sheeter
- Food Processors

Facility Benefits (Included in Membership)

- Utilities
- On-site storage rental for dry, cooler, and freezer spaces
- Waste management (trash, recycling, composting)
- Pest maintenance
- Preventative equipment maintenance
- Ice machine
- Delivery receiving area
- Break room
- 24/7-member access

Support Services (for Hire)

- Business Support: liabilities insurance, legal insurance, marketing and branding, business planning assistance, and finance and accounting services.
- Product Support: labeling guidelines, nutrition analysis, product distribution channels, and ingredient sourcing outlets.
- Regulatory Compliance Support: ODA, CHD, FDA navigation, Food Safety and Sanitation Guidelines, process flow and HACCP plan creation, and ServSafe certification courses.

Findlay Market shines bright at night in the center of Cincinnati, Ohio.



The Ripple Effect Within the Community

Providing Access to Markets

Findlay Kitchen also offers [Findlay Market](#), which is Ohio's oldest continuously operated public market and is one of Cincinnati's most cherished institutions. Findlay Market welcomes more than one million visitors each year, is open Tuesday through Sunday year-round and remains the bustling center of farm-fresh, locally sourced, artisanal, and specialty foods in the community. Findlay Market is home to more than 50 full-time merchants selling meat, fish, poultry, produce, flowers, cheese, deli, ethnic foods, and more. On the weekends, Findlay Market also hosts numerous street performers and several special events at the Findlay Farmers Market.

Commenting on her connection and experience with Findlay Market, Sarah (from Honey Child) said "We've had great success with the Findlay Market, we were able to give our very first pitch, after graduating from [Findlay Launch](#) (discussed further below), for members of Findlay Market Findlay Market is really our anchor, Findlay Kitchen is across the street from the Market, and we set up every weekend and the market really became our home base. It is the closest thing we have to a brick and mortar." Christina (from Davis Cookie Collection) who participated in the Findlay Market a few times while at Findlay Kitchen said "It was a good experience; I feel like we were able to make our products more noticeable to new customers or people that hadn't heard about us. So, the additional exposure was really good." Seena (from Paktli) loved participating in the summer Farmer's Market at Findlay Market and shared "The kitchen has this amazing opportunity and relationship with being connected to a market... My original business plan was to sell my products solely online. But, because my product is an ancient Mesoamerican traditional food item, I've discovered that people need to sample it first. Having Findlay Market was extremely beneficial to my business because people need to taste my product to fall in love with it and the Findlay Market allows for that."

Findlay Kitchen also offers a curated monthly box which includes products from multiple kitchen members through [Findlay Kitchen Curated](#). Findlay Kitchen Curated was a program that began in the Fall of 2020 to help market products made by Findlay Kitchen members. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the Findlay Kitchen members were utilizing the Findlay Market to gain exposure for their businesses and sell their products to customers. During the pandemic, those opportunities evaporated overnight, and foot traffic was much lower than the previous summer. So, the Findlay Kitchen Curated box was a way that Findlay Kitchen could feature five or six of their members at once for an entire month and get their products directly in the hands of customers to try. All three businesses participated in at least one of the curated boxes, and it remains a marketing option still available as of July 2022. Seena participated in three Findlay Kitchen Curated boxes and stated they were a good opportunity to get exposure to new customers. Sarah participated in a few Findlay Kitchen Curated boxes and although it is a smaller endeavor for her business, she thought that the boxes were a great idea especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when everything was shut down. She believes it was a great way to interact with other businesses and new customers.

Findlay Launch is an Accelerator Program for Food Related Businesses located in Cincinnati, Ohio and is the first of its kind in their region, with a specific focus on giving real-time experience to food-related retail and restaurant concepts. Findlay Launch is designed to provide entrepreneurs the space and support to get to their needed proof of concept more quickly. It is a two-part program made up of a 10-week curriculum-based program leading to a business residency in one of their Findlay Launch storefront locations in the Findlay Market District. The first part of the program is the Food Entrepreneur Course. From branding to operations and business accounting, Findlay

Launch brings in experts to share best practices to support the growth of independently owned food businesses. This course includes relevant pre-work, exercises, and business feedback to prepare “Storefront Residents” to successfully operate their Findlay Launch storefronts as well as prepare for the next stage of food entrepreneurship. After the business has completed the course, Storefront Residents will operate their business for a minimum of nine months in a space renovated and equipped for retail food business in the heart of Findlay Market District. This residency-based program gives new businesses access to a robust customer base, business mentorship, industry education, and real-time experience needed to validate and refine concept viability.

Findlay Kitchen not only offers shared kitchen space and business marketing services, but they also offer a wide variety of market channels and exposure opportunities for its members. Through the work and community engagement efforts of Findlay Kitchen, Findlay Market, Findlay Kitchen Curated Boxes, and Findlay Launch the kitchen has built strong relationships with food retailers and event organizers who frequently ask them for recommendations of businesses that could sell in their stores or be vendors at their events. Sarah currently has a relationship with Whole Foods Market based on her relationship with Findlay Kitchen that helped her business during the COVID-19 pandemic: her product has been in Whole Foods Market for almost a year and is now in over 10 stores.

Opening Doors for Underrepresented Communities

Findlay Kitchen is a mission-driven organization that places special emphasis on cultivating women, immigrant, and minority-owned businesses. These businesses currently comprise 80% of the Findlay Kitchen members’ community. Findlay Kitchen places a high value on playing a positive role in growing a dynamic and inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem that is truly representative of their changing community. By partnering with like-minded organizations and donors, Findlay Kitchen is able to lower their barriers to entry, and provide scholarships and other business building growth opportunities. For example, Findlay Launch aims to build equity and inclusivity in the food industry and has an intentional focus on supporting black, indigenous, people of color, women, and immigrant-owned businesses. Findlay Launch residents find a supportive and knowledgeable network to help expedite finding their permanent home postgraduation, which further enriches local neighborhoods with businesses that will bring people together over the common connectors – food and shared experiences.

Words of Advice

From the Kitchen

“You have to make sure you have as much space as possible for storage and always get more electrical capacity than you know you need. This has saved us, if we wanted to expand, we could because of those two factors.”

– Matt Owens, Findlay Kitchen Business Manager

From the Businesses

“You have to be at the right moment and the right time. I waited 15 years for this moment, and it all has to come together. My biggest piece of advice is to pursue what you want to do with meaning and farmer’s markets are a great way to start!”

- Seena Christi, the Founder of Paktli Foods

“First you should take baby steps and moving into a kitchen incubator is essential. Becoming a member of a kitchen incubator helps you know your measurements and pricing and find your target audience. You have to have passion for your business and your idea because entrepreneurship is hard, but if the passion is there, you can do it!”

- Christina Davis, Co-Founder of Davis Cookie Collection

“Do it and start in a shared-use kitchen!”

- Sarah Thompson, Founder of Honey Child Artisan Pops

Endnotes

1 Meader McCausland, Dawn, Rachael Miller, Ashley Colpaart, Meghan King. 2018 Shared Kitchen Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Planning, Launching and Managing a Shared-Use Commercial Kitchen. Fort Collins, CO: The Food

2 Econsult Solutions, Inc. 2020. U.S. Kitchen Incubators: An Industry Update. Retrieved from https://econsultsolutions.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Kitchen-Incubators-2019_1.14.20.pdf