

**From:** [Jan Dietrick](#)  
**To:** [ClerkoftheBoard](#)  
**Subject:** Fwd: Item No. 63 - Support development of MEHKO program, draft comment to bos  
**Date:** Monday, December 18, 2023 10:09:48 AM

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Dear Ventura County Supervisors,

I encourage you to support the development of a MEHKO program following the example in San Diego County. It is a great way to expand opportunity and meet the needs of women and people of color to launch a small business providing meals to others, meals that are needed and valued.

MEHKO programs further the General Plan goal for a more diverse economy and in particular Program EV-3.2 for Small Business Promotion. MEHKOs support the county's Environmental Justice policy LU-17.8 to limit concentrations of unhealthy food providers and encourage healthier food options within neighborhoods or near child-oriented uses. A MEHKO program might include a program aligned with General Plan Program AG-F for operators to access locally grown nutritious foods so that the county could make more real progress on policy AG-4.1. It is easy to imagine MEHKOs mutually supporting policy AG-3.1 to encourage locally-owned farms and specialty products that can supply MEHKO operations. Training can be offered to MEHKO operators in food as medicine and food needs related to disaster preparedness to further increase community health and resilience.

My background is in Public Health Nutrition and I was a Registered Dietitian for 14 years managing quantity food service operations. The Food Handler Training required for MEHKO start-ups can have a beneficial effect on the whole community to broaden awareness about safe food handling. The cities who wrote letters of opposition need more education as their concerns are a very small risk as indicated by the experience in counties that have opted in. A MEHKO operator is not going to risk a bad reputation. However, if someone gets out of line, it is manageable under existing nuisance ordinances.

MEHKO programs are important in their low entry cost as an economic and workforce development stepping stone. They broaden community resilience through the development of connections, relationships, and networks with the potential to much better meet underserved cultural or health needs through uncommon or special foods and to develop capacity horizontally to feed people in a disaster.

Above all I view the MEHKO program as ***an important community support for those who want to do these businesses***. Many individuals have limited employment skills besides cooking or a very strong desire to own a small food service business. My best memories managing food service operations were while working with many dozens of people who find very deep satisfaction and purpose in preparing food for others. I ran a senior lunch catering operation where all of my food service employees and volunteers were low-income over 55 years of age. Especially in that demographic, there are many people who love to cook for others. Many who love to cook for others lack the opportunity on any scale. Cooking for others (especially when it is not as fulltime employment working for an institution) is an expression of care and support that we could use more of in our communities.

The stories of MEHKO cooks in other localities are full of creativity, excitement and joy. Eating food made in such a spirit makes us healthier and happier.

Sincerely,

Jan Dietrick, MPH, former Registered Dietitian  
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