

Developing a Michigan Food Truck Business Concept

**A WORKSHEET TO GUIDE YOUR
BUSINESS PLANNING**



Kendra Wills and Jamie Rahrig

Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	4
Branding and Identification	5
Roles and Responsibilities	7
Business Development	8
Food Truck Menu	10
Competitive Advantage	11
Target Audience	12
Food Truck Layout and Design	13
Operation Schedule	14
Selling Schedule	15
Waste Management Services	16
Food Truck/Trailer Maintenance	16
Ingredient Sourcing	17
Food Truck Labor	18
Marketing Plan	19
Business Finances	20

Acknowledgements

AUTHORS

Kendra Wills
Michigan State University Extension and MSU Product Center

Jamie Rahrig
MSU Center for Regional Food Systems and MSU Product Center

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the following organizations and individuals for their contribution to this project: the Grand Rapids Food Truck Association, Kent County Health Department, and Katje Armentrout (former Michigan State University Extension and MSU Product Center), Madelina DiLisi, MSU Center for Regional Food Systems for copy-editing and Melissa Hill, MSU Center for Regional Food Systems, for design.

Support for this work comes from MSU Extension and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Regional Food Business Center program.

Photo credits: Kendra Wills

Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, or veteran status.

El Servicio de Extensión (Extension Service) de MSU ofrece programas educativos, actividades, y materiales sin discriminación basada sobre edad, color, incapacidades, identidad o expresión de identidad sexual, información genética, estado matrimonial, origen nacional, raza, religión, sexo, orientación sexual, o estado de veteran.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Wills, K. and Rahrig, J. (2025) *Developing a Michigan Food Truck Business Concept: A Worksheet to Guide Your Business Planning*. Michigan State University Extension, Product Center, and Center for Regional Food Systems. www.canr.msu.edu/resources/developing-a-michigan-food-truck-business-concept.

Introduction

Owning and operating a food truck can be a good source of revenue for a food service business. A food truck business can also be a great way to get products into the market and build a client base before opening a brick-and-mortar location. It can mean lower overhead costs when starting out but also comes with specific licensing and regulatory requirements. Use the *Developing a Michigan Food Truck Business Concept: A Worksheet to Guide Your Business Planning* to develop the steps needed to guide decisions about operating a food truck business.

WHAT'S INCLUDED?

- Guiding questions to help identify steps in planning, such as ingredient sourcing or drafting a selling schedule.
- A printable or fillable worksheet to develop a plan.
- A list of other freely available resources from Michigan State University and other organizations for food business entrepreneurs.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this worksheet is to guide entrepreneurs through the process of developing a concept for a food truck business. This worksheet should not be presented directly to a bank or credit union for business financing but instead used as a guide to develop a business plan.

A traditional business plan is typically necessary for this purpose. You can find free templates for traditional business plans at www.score.org or in the [Loan Readiness Toolbox for Food and Farm Businesses](#) at MSU Center for Regional Food Systems' website.

The free online course from Michigan State University Extension titled, "How to Start a Food Truck Business in Michigan" uses the business plan template from www.score.org. This online course is available in both English and Spanish. This course will guide you through the development of a more detailed business plan for your food truck business. Access the course at the following links:

English: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/courses/how-to-start-a-food-truck-business>

Spanish: https://www.canr.msu.edu/courses/c-mo-iniciar-un-negocio-m-vil-de-comida?language_id=2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THE WORKSHEET

Before digging into the worksheet, read through it and gather any key information needed to complete it. Once you have gathered the necessary information, fill in the worksheet blanks. This worksheet can help you develop a business plan to launch, scale and grow your food truck business.

DATE: _____

NAME(S) OF BUSINESS OWNER(S):



It is recommended to work with a professional branding specialist and designer for a brand that stands out and attracts more customers.

BRANDING AND IDENTIFICATION

**What will be the theme of your food truck business?
Complete the following questions to describe your vision.**

Describe your menu theme. For example: Asian/Mexican Fusion Cuisine, French Pastries and Coffee, or Sweet and Savory Crepes.

Describe your signature colors, graphics and the overall look and feel of your truck.

Name of Food Truck Business: _____

Did you check with the Michigan Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Agency to make sure your name is not being used by another business in Michigan?

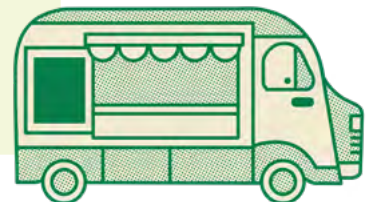
Website: www.michigan.gov/corpenitysearch

_____ Yes

_____ No



Signage/vinyl wrapping should be easy to read and understand from a distance and in a crowded festival environment.



Did you reserve a website URL and social media usernames for your business name?

_____ Yes, list it here:

_____ No

Website URL: _____

Facebook username: _____

Instagram username: _____

TikTok username: _____

Popular social media outlets for food trucks are Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. You don't want your business to be easily confused with a similar name in Michigan or in another state.

Is your business name Trademarked?

_____ Yes, list the details here:

_____ No



Note about Trademarking: If your name isn't trademarked and another business trademarks your business name or something very similar, it is possible you would have to re-name your business. This can be costly as your truck exterior graphics would need to be updated and all of your social media and website would need to change for a new name. Trademarking is best done under the guidance of a legal professional to ensure it is done correctly. Contact your local Chamber of Commerce for a referral for an attorney specializing in trademarking in your area.



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Explain the skills the owners or employees bring to ensure the success of this business. Do you have a culinary professional? Do you have a person with accounting or finance skills that can oversee the income, expenses, and cash flow for the business? Do you have a marketing professional that can build a base of clients and followers? Complete the following table with the names of your team members that will be responsible for each task. Some blank rows have been added for any additional tasks.

Note: If no member of your team has worked in the food industry before, it may be beneficial to secure a position working on a food truck before launching your own business or participate in culinary training through a Community College or similar educational program.

Task/Role	Person(s) Responsible
Menu Development	
Ingredient Sourcing/Purchasing of Supplies	
Cooking	
Taking Orders/Operating Point of Sale System	
Handling Sales Tax Payments and Business Taxes	
Social Media Marketing/Other Marketing	
Scheduling Events	
Staffing Schedule	
Truck Maintenance and Storage	
Licensing and Inspections	
Business planning	
Monitoring Income, Expenses and Cash Flow	
Payroll	
Taxes documentation	
ServSafe Certified Manager(s)*	

*For more information on becoming a ServSafe Manager, visit www.servsafe.com.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Respond to the following questions to help develop details on your business structure, licensing, and regulations.

Has a Formal LLC or Business Structure Been Formed?

_____ Yes

_____ No

State Where LLC/Corporation has been filed and date of filing:

State: _____ Date of filing: _____

Or date when LLC/Corporation filing was renewed: _____

Planned Date of Launch of Food Truck Business: _____

Licensing Agency: _____

Date of Licensing Inspection: _____

License Type: Mobile Unit or STFU _____

Liability Insurance Provider _____

Point of Sale System _____

Name and Contact Information of Health Department Inspector(s):

Food trucks in Michigan often need a permit to operate in the cities, villages, and townships where they plan to conduct business. This permitting process may also include an inspection by the local fire department. If your food truck is planning on attending a festival, check with the local government agency where the festival will be held to determine if a permit will be needed. If your food truck is catering a private event, local government permits may not be required because typically local government permits are only required for public events when food trucks are selling to the public. Local government permits typically last for one-year. When in doubt, always reach out to your local government agency for clarity.

Local Government Units where Permits will be acquired this year:

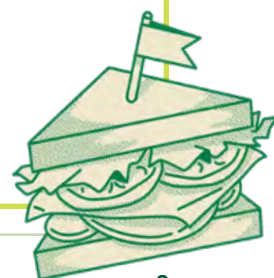
Date of Licensing Inspection: _____



In Michigan, LLCs are renewed annually.



Your licensing agency is typically the Local Health Department where your commissary kitchen is located and/or where your food truck is based. If you travel to different states, you will need to secure licensing in every state.



FOOD TRUCK BUSINESS MISSION STATEMENT

This should be a statement to explain the purpose of the business, the type of food that will be served, as well as goals, values, and objectives. A mission statement should be easy to understand and no more than 1-3 sentences in length. Write your mission statement below.



FOOD TRUCK MENU

A food truck menu should be simple. Limit menu options and focus on a few quality items that are easy to prepare and serve within just a few minutes. When creating your menu, always consider the time it will take to prepare and serve any item on your menu. Customers expect fast service from food trucks. As soon the customer places their order, the clock starts ticking. In the United States, food truck customers are typically drawn to ethnic foods, allergen-free foods, healthy foods, unique desserts, and menus that prioritize locally sourced ingredients.

When creating a menu, food truck businesses should consider the cost of recipe ingredients, as well as the cost of labor it takes to make each item. These should be identified before establishing a retail price for each item. To calculate these costs, check out the menu costing tool from Food Truck Empire that can be downloaded for free at the following link. It is worth the time to download because these spreadsheets have helpful formulas built in to save time. <https://foodtruckempire.com/restaurant/menu-recipe-cost-tool/>

Create your food truck menu using the table below:

Breakfast Items	Retail Price	Lunch Items	Retail Price	Dinner Items	Retail Price
Other Items:					

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Describe how the food truck business will perform in a crowded marketplace. Food trucks often compete with area restaurants and food truck businesses. Understanding how your food truck business is unique will help you understand your business' competitive advantage. Remember that all businesses have competitors no matter how unique they are.

Who are your top 5 competitors?

1

2

3

4

5

Give four reasons why your business is a better choice than your competitors:

1

2

3

4



TARGET AUDIENCE

Describe regular or repeat customers of the food truck business. Outline target customers in detail and explain how the business is uniquely positioned to serve this audience. When describing customers, consider demographic data such as age, location, income, and lifestyle. Please note: "Everyone eats so *everyone* is my potential customer." is not considered a valid answer when defining target audiences.



Target Customer: _____

Age: _____ Location: _____ Income: _____

Lifestyle:

How we serve them:



Target Customer: _____

Age: _____ Location: _____ Income: _____

Lifestyle:

How we serve them:

FOOD TRUCK LAYOUT AND DESIGN

Draw a layout of your truck/trailer that includes your kitchen equipment. To complete this task, be sure you work with the Health Inspector to calculate what size requirements are needed for the capacity of your truck/trailer's water tank. A water tank that is too small is a common reason why food trucks do not receive their license on the first attempt. Construction on your food truck/trailer should not occur until the approval of your Health Department Inspector is obtained. If you purchased a used food truck or trailer, you should not start any remodeling until your local health inspector has approved your plan for changes. Construction prior to gaining approval from your licensing agency can result in expensive construction costs to fix issues that will be required to secure a license to operate your business.

To find a used food truck or trailer for sale in Michigan, conduct an Internet search and there will likely be several to choose from. You can also find custom food truck builders based in Michigan online. If you purchase a truck or trailer from another state, you will likely have to make some changes to make sure it meets licensing standards in Michigan.

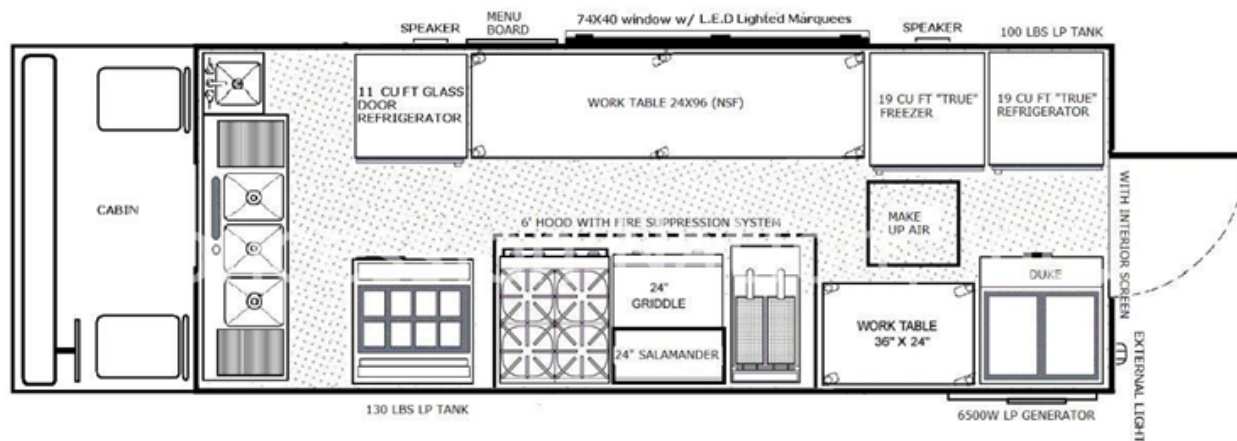
Be sure you have all the equipment you will need to produce all the items on your menu – or note which items will be prepared in a commissary kitchen.



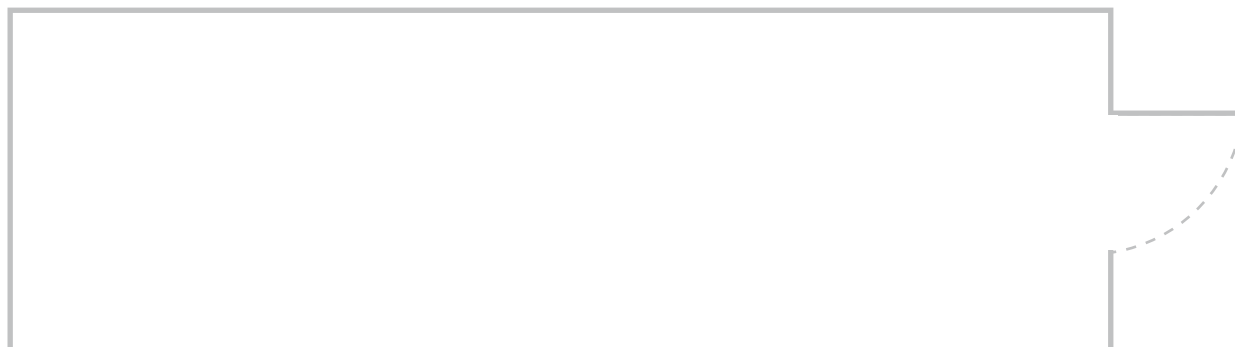
When designing the layout of the food truck it is recommended to work with a professional with expertise in food truck buildouts in Michigan.

An example layout and design from

<https://concessionnation.com/shop/floor-plans/food-truck-design/>



Your Layout:



OPERATION SCHEDULE

There is a lot to consider when determining your operation schedule. For example, will you be using a commissary or shared-use kitchen for your food truck business?

Where will you store your food truck in the season and off season? Use the following guiding questions to figure out the logistics of your food truck business.

If you will be using a commissary kitchen, list the name and location. Do you have a formal rental agreement? A formal agreement will be required for a Mobile Unit License.

_____ I will not be using a commissary kitchen. I will be storing all food and washing all dishes and equipment on my food truck/trailer (STFU license).

_____ I will be using a commissary kitchen.

Commissary Kitchen Name: _____

Address:

List of tasks to be performed at the Commissary Kitchen. This may include: dishwashing, ingredient storage, equipment storage, waste disposal, food preparation, and more.

Formal Rental Agreement Signed On: _____



- Visit events before you commit to them if possible.
- It is a best practice not to commit to events before you are licensed and ready for business.
- The licensing process can take longer than anticipated and you don't want to earn a bad reputation before you launch.

[illegible]

Food Truck Storage Off Season:



WASTE MANAGEMENT SERVICE

Complete the following sections to be sure you have considered the waste produced by a food truck.

Where will you dispose of waste from your food truck business?

Fryer Oil Disposal Method and Location: _____

Trash Removal Services: _____

Recycling Services: _____

FOOD TRUCK/TRAILER MAINTENANCE

Propane Tank Refueling: _____

Electrical Contractor: _____

Fire Suppression System Contractor: _____

Kitchen Equipment Maintenance Services: _____

Hood Cleaning Services: _____

Vehicle Maintenance and Repair: _____

Other: _____

INGREDIENT SOURCING

In the section below, list where you will source your ingredients. Consider that paying retail prices for ingredients will require you to charge your customers a higher price. Explore ways to purchase ingredients directly or buy from wholesale markets when possible. Remember that food truck customers are attracted to locally sourced ingredients.

Ingredient	Source
Poultry	
Beef	
Pork	
Other Meats	
Breads	
Eggs	
Dairy/Cheese	
Fruits	
Vegetables	
Grains	
Sauces	
Desserts	
Other	
Beverages	
Paper Goods and Silverware	
Miscellaneous	

FOOD TRUCK LABOR

Describe the staffing positions on the food truck and include the name of each person filling those positions (or if you will need to hire someone). Noting how many hours each week each position will be required to work. Make sure this plan aligns with the schedule outlined above. It is also helpful if the salary and benefits for each position are listed.



It is wise to have at least two people working on the food truck for all shifts.

Complete the following chart to track how you will staff your food truck:

Name of Position	Short Job Description	Name of Person Filling this Position (or if Need to Hire)	Hours per Week	Salary and Benefits

MARKETING PLAN

Refer to your target customers that you described in the previous section. Explain your strategy for reaching these customers. Remember that food trucks rely heavily on social media to connect with customers.

Describe your strategy for growing your followers and who will implement the marketing plan. Be specific about social media sites and other marketing tools that you plan to use and be sure these expenses are included in your marketing budget and overall start-up and operating budgets.

Lastly, note how success will be determined for each strategy. For example, will you be measuring in dollar value of sales increases, website views or an increase in social media followers that resulted from the campaign.

Complete the table below to develop your marketing strategies:



Target Customers	Communication Strategy	Budget	Person Responsible	Date	Measure of Impact

BUSINESS FINANCES

Maintaining strong records and tracking your food truck's expenses and profit is critical to the success of your business. If you are considering financing your truck, you will need proper documentation for a loan application. Find template documents and instructions in the [Loan Readiness Toolbox for Food and Farm Businesses](#) available from MSU Center for Regional Food Systems.

Other sources of valuable templates for start-up businesses can be found at on SCORE's Template Gallery at this link <https://www.score.org/templates-resources/business-planning-financial-statements-template-gallery>. Templates available on this page including a Start-Up Expenses Template (be sure to include licensing and permit fees), Operating Budget, 12-Month Sales Forecast, 12-Month Cash Flow Statement, and a Three-Year Sales Projections Template.

These templates are useful tools to help business owners plan for success. Without knowing and understanding the business's finances, businesses often fail in the first two years. Note that sales taxes, business taxes, and credit card fees also need to be included in the Operating Budget.

SCORE recommends that 20-25% of the startup budget be reserved for contingencies. Another helpful tool in this section is a template for the Opening Date Balance Sheet. This will help you understand the financial state of your business on opening day.

It is important to understand that many businesses fail because they do not have enough cash flow. If you buy a large amount of inventory at once and have payments from catering jobs that may not come in for 30 days or more, you want to be sure your business won't run out of money.

Keeping strong financial records is important in any business. Most lenders require three years of projected revenue and expenses listed on a per-month basis. By using software or online programs like QuickBooks or Wave, you can track your expenses, cash flow, and create reports like profit and loss statements.



Be sure to include truck/trailer and equipment maintenance as a monthly expense (due to the frequency of need for repairs when dealing with a traveling kitchen on bumpy roads).



If the food truck will be traveling to events, be sure to budget for meals, lodging, fuel, and other travel related expenses as needed.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

STARTING A FOOD TRUCK BUSINESS ONLINE COURSE

Be sure to watch the no-cost course, *Starting a Food Truck Business* from MSU Extension's Community Food Systems team and Product Center, to help understand what is involved with launching a business of your own. Participants will receive a certificate upon successful completion of all course requirements. Sign up for the on-demand course at this link <https://www.canr.msu.edu/courses/how-to-start-a-food-truck-business>.

FUNDING SOURCES FOR FOOD-RELATED BUSINESSES DIRECTORY

Learn how to jumpstart your business with the featured resources in the latest edition of the Funding Sources for Food-Related Businesses directory, found here: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/foodsystems/Funding-Sources-for-Food-Related-Businesses/index>.

This digital resource from MSU Center for Regional Food Systems identifies local, statewide, national, and global opportunities for financial support for farmers, food producers, distributors, food hubs, other food-related businesses, and business assistance providers.

Formerly published in PDF format, this interactive digital directory of the MSU Center for Regional Food Systems Funding Sources for Food-Related Businesses, allows the reader to search funding sources by:

- Ownership
- Funding type
- Business sector
- Funding amounts

GRANT WRITING FOR FARM AND FOOD ENTREPRENEURS ONLINE COURSE

This course is designed for food and farm business owners in Michigan to better understand the grant writing process, as well as provide information about grant writing opportunities for specialty food businesses. In this course participants will:

- Develop a better understanding of whether grant writing is the best option for their business needs and goals
- Learn how to find, write, and apply for grants that are relevant to their food business and its future funding needs
- Write a complete grant proposal outline which can be edited or altered for future grant funding opportunities

Find the Grant writing for Farm and Food Entrepreneurs Online Course here:

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/courses/msue-grant-writing-for-farm-and-food-entrepreneurs>

MOBILE FOOD VEHICLE FIRE SAFETY ONLINE COURSE

This free, online course is taught by Lt. William Smith with the Grand Rapids Fire Department as a fire safety course for mobile food vehicles that intend to operate in the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan. This is a self-paced course that may be helpful to mobile food vehicle operators from other jurisdictions. Please check with your local fire department on their requirements for mobile food truck vehicles.

Register here: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/courses/mobile-food-vehicle-fire-safety>

CENTER FOR REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEMS

VISION

CRFS envisions a thriving economy, equity, and sustainability for Michigan, the country, and the planet through food systems rooted in local regions and centered on Good Food: food that is healthy, green, fair, and affordable.

MISSION

The mission of CRFS is to engage the people of Michigan, the United States, and the world in applied research, education, and outreach to develop regionally integrated, sustainable food systems.

ABOUT

CRFS joins in Michigan State University's legacy of applied research, education, and outreach by catalyzing collaboration and fostering innovation among the diverse range of people, processes, and places involved in regional food systems. Working in local, state, national, and global spheres, CRFS' projects span from farm to fork, including production, processing, distribution, policy, and access.

Center for Regional Food Systems

Michigan State University
480 Wilson Road
Natural Resources Building
East Lansing, MI, 48824

foodsystems.msu.edu

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

MSU is committed to achieving excellence through an inclusive culture that encourages all people to reach their full potential. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Quentin Tyler, Director
MSU Extension
East Lansing, MI 48824

This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned.