

Homemade food bill on Brown's desk

By Karen E. Klein, Bloomberg

Kristen Farrar would like to sell the cakes, scones and muffins she bakes, using figs, walnuts and citrus from farms near her home in Fresno. But the homeschooling mom of two can't afford to rent commercial kitchen space or pay the \$50,000 she estimates it would take to turn a shed on her property into a certified commercial kitchen, in which food for sale must be prepared under state law.

Farrar is hoping she won't have to comply with the old rules because of new legislation – the California Homemade Food Act – that was approved last month and is awaiting Gov. Jerry Brown's signature. It would allow home-based entrepreneurs to sell \$35,000 to \$50,000 annually in “non-potentially hazardous” foods such as breads, jams and candy.

If Brown signs the bill into law, California will become one of 32 states with cottage food laws, sometimes called “baker's bills” because they often apply to home-baked goods. The financial crisis and recession have sparked the passage of 14 of these laws since 2008, many championed by would-be entrepreneurs motivated by pay cuts and layoffs.

They've also stirred concern, both from established business owners wary of competition and public health advocates concerned about food-borne illness.

Being able to sell the goodies she makes in her home kitchen would allow Farrar to test her products at farmers' markets and get onto shelves at local grocers and coffee shops. If her items prove popular, she says, she plans to upgrade to a commercial facility and expand production.

“Once you get your foot in the door and make a name for yourself, then that’s when you can go out and get a shop – maybe three or four years down the road – and make a decent living,” she says.

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