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**From:** Lauren Wolfer <lauren@cookalliance.org>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 18, 2024 9:28 AM  
**To:** Clerk/BOS  
**Subject:** Public Comment: Item 62 (MEHKO Grant)

**CAUTION!!! - EXTERNAL EMAIL - THINK BEFORE YOU CLICK**

Good Morning Board of Supervisors,

My name is Lauren Wolfer and I am speaking today in favor of Item 62, in my role as Outreach and Advocacy Director for COOK Alliance, a nonprofit committed to legitimizing the sale of home cooked food. Our organization has actively supported permitted home-based culinary businesses across the state with education and resources and have seen the success first hand. We have worked with counties and environmental health departments throughout the state on implementation of Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operation (or MEHKO for short) programs and have collected data and tracked progress.

We are thrilled to see Fresno County receive this grant funding and urge the Board to move forward swiftly with the implementation of a MEHKO program. A MEHKO program will enhance food safety and make more education and resources available to the home cooks that are already operating informally in the shadows. This would also provide the community with access to one of the most affordable pathways to culinary entrepreneurship, fostering the creation of new small businesses and creating more dining opportunities within the county.

The County of San Diego began their MEHKO program with a successful two year pilot program and voted last fall to make their program permanent. During this initial two year period, there were no major risk factor violations observed, no reports of food borne illness, and no reports of community impact complaints. This reflects the pattern we have seen across California.

Our organization hopes to work with your health department and local nonprofits to provide education, outreach, resources, and support with the goal of helping to build new local businesses and cultivating the community. We are also in the process of disbursing \$1.5M in state-funded equity grants through our education program, COOK Academy. Cook Academy is an eight-week online course that teaches essential business skills and provides a \$3,000 grant upon completion to empower home cooks in establishing their own MEHKO business. Residents of Fresno County will be eligible for these grants if the County establishes a MEHKO program.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to working with you to promote a culinary industry that is inclusive and supportive of economic growth for all.

With appreciation,  
Lauren



**Lauren Wolfer**  
Outreach and Advocacy Director  
[cookalliance.org](http://cookalliance.org)  
760-831-6553  
*she/her/hers*