

The First 90 Days of a Home Bakery

A practical launch guide: licences, pricing, essential kit and your first customers

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1. Your 90-Day Launch Map

Start small. Make the work repeatable. Grow from evidence.

Your first 90 days are not a race to buy a commercial mixer or offer every cake imaginable. Use them to establish whether you can make a small range legally, consistently and at a price that pays for your time.

This guide uses a **U.S. starting context**, because no location was supplied. It is an action framework, not legal, tax or food-safety advice. Before selling, obtain the requirements for your own state, county and city. Outside the U.S., replace those authorities with the relevant local equivalents.

Days 1–30: Build the foundation

- Identify your regulator and confirm permitted products and sales channels.
- Choose three candidate products and standardise their recipes.
- Time test batches, measure saleable yield and build a cost sheet.
- Audit the equipment you already own before buying anything.

Days 31–60: Run a controlled launch

- Begin sales only after required approvals are in place.
- Open a limited preorder window with clear collection arrangements.
- Record actual production time, waste and customer feedback.
- Adjust the menu or price when the evidence calls for it.

Days 61–90: Make good orders repeatable

- Keep the products that customers want and you can produce reliably.
- Create a repeat-order reminder customers can choose to receive.
- Review cash, capacity and earnings before increasing volume.

Day-90 decision: continue, simplify, change direction or pause. A sustainable small bakery is a better result than a busy one that loses money.

Your launch promise: “I make [product] for [customer/occasion], available through [approved channel] on [schedule].”

2. Licences: Find Your Actual Rules

Do not confuse a business registration with permission to sell food.

In the U.S., a home-based food business can be subject to state and local rules as well as applicable federal requirements. FDA directs prospective operators to state and local health

departments. Licensing requirements vary with location and activities; there is no single national home-bakery permit that answers every question. Sources: FDA: How to Start a Food Business and SBA: Launch Your Business.

Make one written enquiry

“I plan to prepare [exact products, including fillings and toppings] in my home kitchen in [city, county, state]. I want to sell through [pickup, markets, delivery, online orders or other channels]. Which rules apply, and where can I find the current written requirements?”

Ask your regulator to confirm:

- Whether each recipe qualifies for home production.
- Whether registration, a permit, inspection or training is required.
- Which sales channels and delivery areas are allowed.
- Whether sales limits or restrictions apply.
- What labels, disclosures and records are required.
- Whether water supply, pets, storage or household activity affect approval.

Separately, ask the relevant offices about zoning or home-occupation rules, business registration and tax obligations. Check your lease or homeowners’ association terms, and discuss business cover with an insurance adviser. These are enquiry prompts, not a statement that every item is compulsory everywhere.

Build a compliance folder

Save the official guidance, authority contact, date checked, written answers, approvals and renewal dates. Record your location as **[to fill in]** and your regulator as **[to fill in]**.

Go/no-go gate: do not accept paid orders until you have confirmed that your products, kitchen and planned sales method meet the requirements that apply to you. Recheck before adding a new product or channel.

3. Licences in Practice: Products, Labels and Records

Approval belongs to the actual product and process—not just its name.

Use a product approval sheet for each item. Write down the recipe version, fillings, toppings, storage method, packaging and intended sales channel. Ask the regulator to review the details; do not assume that every cake, frosting or filling is suitable for your home-food route.

Create a label checklist to confirm locally

Ask which of the following your label must include and in what form:

- Product identity and net quantity.
- Business identity, contact information or permitted identification alternative.
- Ingredients, including components of compound ingredients.
- Allergen declarations.

- Required home-kitchen or cottage-food statement.
- Any required storage directions or other disclosures.

The precise wording is location- and product-dependent. Use the final version your authority requires, not a generic label copied from social media. The FDA starting-business resource links to federal food-labelling and allergen resources; your local authority should confirm their application to your operation. FDA reference.

Keep a simple batch record

For each production run, record: date; product and recipe version; ingredient brands and lot details where available; batch identifier; quantity made; quantity sold or discarded; and relevant customer orders. Retain original supplier labels so recipe and allergen information can be checked.

Plan ingredient storage, cleaning, household separation and allergen handling with the guidance applicable to your kitchen. Do not promise “allergen-free” without a properly validated basis. A warning statement is not a substitute for the controls your regulator requires.

Set a problem-response routine

If a safety concern is reported, stop selling the affected batch, keep the relevant records and contact your regulator for instructions. Do not improvise advice about whether the food is safe.

Action today: finish one product sheet and one draft label, then obtain the missing answers before launch.

4. Pricing: Count the Whole Batch

Your own time is part of the cost—not whatever is left over.

Build one cost sheet per recipe. Update it when supplier prices, pack sizes or yields change. Use actual measurements from your kitchen rather than a recipe’s optimistic serving count.

The full-cost method

1. **Ingredients:** purchase price ÷ usable purchase quantity × quantity used.
2. **Packaging:** boxes, liners, labels and other per-order materials.
3. **Labour:** hands-on production, packing, cleaning and order administration × your chosen hourly rate.
4. **Overhead allocation:** a reasonable share of recurring business costs.
5. **Waste:** record expected unsaleable output or spoiled ingredients without counting it twice.

Divide the batch total by the **saleable** yield. If two cookies from a 24-cookie batch cannot be sold, spread the batch cost over 22, not 24.

Worked example: illustrative figures only

These are invented teaching numbers, not recommended prices or market benchmarks. All amounts are USD.

Cost for one batch	Example amount
Ingredients	$12.00
Packaging	$6.00
Labour: 1.5 hours × $18	$27.00
Allocated overhead	$5.00
Total batch cost	**$50.00**
Saleable yield	24 cookies

Full cost per cookie = $50 ÷ 24 = **$2.08**, rounded for display. Keep unrounded figures in the working calculation. This example assumes all 24 are saleable and does not include a separate waste allowance.

Your inputs: ingredient cost [to fill in]; packaging [to fill in]; labour hours [to fill in]; hourly rate [to fill in]; overhead [to fill in]; saleable yield [to fill in].

Action today: cost the simplest product first. If the numbers do not work, change the recipe, portion, packaging or process before taking orders.

5. Pricing: Turn Cost into a Selling Price

A markup and a margin are not the same calculation.

For your worksheet, define margin consistently as the share of sales remaining after the costs included in your calculation. Do not describe this full-cost planning margin as an accounting gross margin without checking how your accounts classify costs.

Price at a target margin = full unit cost ÷ (1 – target margin).

Using the previous page's unrounded cost, a hypothetical 30% target gives $2.0833 ÷ 0.70 = approximately **$2.98 per cookie**. A 30% markup instead gives $2.0833 × 1.30 = approximately **$2.71**. Neither target is a recommendation.

Include selling charges explicitly

If a processor charges a percentage fee, include it in the price equation rather than pretending it does not exist:

Price = (order cost + fixed transaction fee) ÷ (1 – percentage fee – target margin).

This assumes the percentage fee applies to that selling price and the target margin is measured on it. The denominator must be positive. Use the provider's actual terms; delivery and tax treatment may change the calculation.

Set clear order boundaries

- Define the minimum order and standard pack size.

- State what customisation includes before quoting.
- Quote delivery separately if offered and permitted.
- Explain payment timing, changes and cancellation terms before purchase.
- Check tax treatment with the appropriate authority or adviser.

Do a reality check against genuine local alternatives, but do not copy their prices without knowing your own costs. If customers will not accept your sustainable price, reconsider the offer—not just your wage.

Monthly break-even check

For break-even, use a separate contribution calculation: selling price minus variable costs. Monthly fixed costs ÷ contribution per order = orders needed to cover those fixed costs. Do not subtract the same allocated fixed overhead again.

Action today: write one clear public price and one complete custom-order quote template.

6. Kit: Buy for the Bottleneck

Start with what you need to produce safely and consistently—not a dream kitchen.

Audit your existing tools against the menu and any equipment requirements your regulator gives you. A mixer upgrade is not useful if your real limit is cooling space or packing time.

Your starter audit

Category	Check before buying
Measuring	Suitable digital scale, dependable measures and repeatable portioning
Mixing	Bowls, spatulas, whisk and equipment suited to the dough or batter
Baking	Appropriate tins or trays, oven capacity and verified performance
Cooling	Enough protected rack space for your planned batch
Storage	Suitable containers, identification and separation arrangements
Packing	Food-suitable packaging, labels and transport protection
Cleaning	Supplies and routines appropriate to your kitchen requirements
Administration	Order log, recipe sheets, cost sheet and payment records

Three buying categories

Need before launch: missing tools that prevent compliant, consistent production of your small menu.

Wait for evidence: extra trays, a larger mixer, specialist decorating equipment or a label printer. Record the problem first; buy only when the purchase solves it.

Skip for now: attractive equipment with no clear relationship to the products customers actually order.

Test your true capacity

Run one complete rehearsal: weigh, mix, bake, cool, pack and clean. Include setup, household interruptions and collection preparation. Record hands-on time separately from elapsed time.

Your order cap should fit your slowest stage, not just your oven. If you can bake four trays but only cool and pack two safely in the available space, plan around two.

Purchase decision card: item [to fill in]; problem solved [to fill in]; current workaround [to fill in]; evidence of need [to fill in].

Action today: complete the audit and identify one bottleneck before adding anything to your shopping list.

7. Days 1–30: Build a Tiny, Reliable Menu

A small menu makes your first experiments easier to understand.

Choose three candidate products for testing—not three compulsory permanent products. Prefer a range that shares some ingredients and fits the kitchen, time and sales permissions you actually have.

Week 1: Confirm the route

Complete the licensing enquiries. Write your launch promise and identify your likely customer: a weekly household treat, celebration gifts, office sharing or another specific occasion. Do not try to serve every occasion at once.

Week 2: Standardise the product

For each candidate, record weights, method, equipment, portion size, saleable yield and packing process. Repeat the recipe and compare the results. Keep a version number so a change in flavour or portion does not silently invalidate your cost sheet.

Week 3: Test the entire experience

Rehearse production through handover. Check that packaging protects the product and that storage instructions match the guidance for the recipe. Do not invent a shelf-life claim; obtain appropriate advice or validation for your product.

Ask tasters specific questions: Was the portion suitable? What occasion would this suit? Was the packaging practical? Their enthusiasm is useful feedback, but it is not yet proof that customers will buy at your intended price.

Week 4: Prepare a controlled offer

Select the strongest products, publish clear descriptions and prepare your first permitted sales window. State pack sizes, prices, order deadline, collection arrangements and relevant allergen information.

Day-30 readiness gate

- Applicable permissions are confirmed.
- Recipes and saleable yields are repeatable.
- Each item has a current cost sheet and price.
- Packaging and required labels are ready.
- A realistic order cap is written down.

Action today: choose one product to improve, not another product to add. If an approval is still pending, keep testing and preparing; do not treat the calendar as permission to trade.

8. First Customers: Launch One Clear Offer

Make it easy for the right person to understand what is available.

Start with one offer for one occasion: for example, a weekend sharing box or a small celebration pack. These are ideas to adapt, not products you are automatically permitted to sell.

Build the offer card

Include the product and pack size, a genuine photograph, the price, relevant ingredient or allergen information, the order deadline, collection or permitted delivery arrangements, and how to place an order. Avoid claims about health, dietary suitability or popularity that you cannot support.

Start with three permission-based channels

- **People who already know your baking:** personally invite them to view the offer without pressuring them to buy.
- **Relevant local communities:** ask administrators before posting and follow their rules.
- **Local partners:** explore introductions or collaborations, but confirm that any wholesale or resale arrangement is allowed before agreeing.

A message you can adapt

“I'm opening a small preorder for [product and pack size] for [date]. It is [price], with collection at [approved arrangements]. Orders close [deadline]. You can see the ingredients, allergen information and ordering details at [to fill in].”

Only publish real availability. Do not manufacture scarcity or invent customer reviews. If you offer a discount, calculate its effect before announcing it.

Track the source, not just the sale

For every enquiry, record where the person found you, what they wanted, whether they ordered and why they declined if they volunteer a reason. Ask for feedback after fulfilment. Request permission before quoting a customer publicly.

Action today: prepare one offer and choose one channel to try first. A manageable batch of paid orders teaches you more than a large audience that never sees a clear invitation to buy.

9. Days 31–60: Turn Orders into a Routine

A good order is clear before baking starts.

Use one order record rather than scattered messages. Confirm customer name and contact details, product, quantity, agreed price, required date, collection or delivery, relevant dietary questions and payment status. Keep personal information limited to what you need and protect access to it.

A repeatable weekly rhythm

Open: publish the actual menu, deadline and available capacity.

Close: confirm orders and stop taking work at your cap.

Prepare: calculate ingredient needs, check stock and prepare packaging.

Produce: follow the recipe and batch record. Do not make unrecorded substitutions.

Pack and hand over: check the product against the order and supply the required information.

Review: compare planned and actual time, yield, costs and waste.

Keep expectations specific

Explain when an enquiry becomes a confirmed order, when payment is due, whether changes can be accepted, and what happens if collection is missed. Check that your terms comply with applicable consumer rules; a homemade policy does not override the law.

When something goes wrong, separate a service issue from a possible safety issue. For the latter, use the stop-sale and regulator-contact routine on page 5. Do not resolve a safety concern with a discount.

Review after every sales window

- Which item was easiest to produce consistently?
- Which item used more time than its price allowed?
- Where did waste or packing delays occur?
- Which channel led to completed orders?
- What single change would improve the next batch?

Action today: turn your last order into a complete record and compare its actual labour with your estimate. Fix the biggest mismatch before raising the order cap.

10. Days 61–90: Keep What Works

Grow the system only after it works at a small scale.

Invite satisfied customers to hear about the next ordering window, with their permission and a clear way to stop receiving messages. Ask what occasion they are buying for; repeat demand may be more useful than adding another flavour.

Your weekly scorecard

Measure	What to record
Completed orders	Orders fulfilled, excluding cancellations
Sales	Record consistently; separate tax collected where applicable
Actual costs	Ingredients, packaging, selling charges and business expenses
Owner hours	Production, cleaning, packing and administration
Waste	Unsold or discarded items and the reason
Returning customers	Customers placing another completed order
Service issues	Late handovers, errors, complaints and actions taken

Do not confuse cash in the account with earnings: unpaid bills, equipment purchases, tax obligations and the timing of customer payments can distort the picture. Review your records with a qualified adviser when needed.

Make one day-90 decision

Continue: the menu is repeatable and the economics justify your time.

Simplify: remove the product, option or channel that creates disproportionate work.

Expand carefully: test one change—another collection window, additional equipment or a new permitted product—and measure it.

Pause: address unresolved permissions, safety controls, workload or losses before accepting more orders.

Your next-30-days commitment

Keep [to fill in]. Stop [to fill in]. Test [to fill in]. Review on [to fill in].

Official starting points

- FDA: How to Start a Food Business — federal starting guidance and state/local signposting.
- SBA: Launch Your Business — business setup and licensing signposting.
- Your state food authority, county health department and city business office: [to fill in].

Sources consulted November 6, 2026. Verify current local rules before acting. All financial figures in this guide are clearly labelled teaching examples, not earnings forecasts or recommended market prices.

Finish with a bakery you can run again next week—not just a launch you can survive once.