

Good enough for all to eat

New law allows you to sell those brownies and muffins.

By LAURA FRENCH
Special to the Star Tribune

If anyone has ever told you that your brownies, banana bread or blueberry muffins are good as gold, from now on they may be right. Minnesota legislation that went into effect on July 1 this year allows Minnesota's bevy of home bakers benefit financially from their culinary expertise.

The new Minnesota Cottage Food Law allows individuals to sell up to \$18,000 a year in non-refrigerated baked goods, as well as some jams, jellies and home-canned pickles, fruits and

vegetables. The food has to be delivered directly from the person who makes it to the "ultimate consumer," either at a venue like a farmers market or community event or via door-to-door delivery.

Shelley Erickson of St. Cloud was active in getting the new law passed. "I found out about five years ago that it was illegal to sell baked goods from your home," she said. "Everybody was telling me 'You should sell your cakes.' The thought that there was a law concerning it really surprised me. My husband said, 'Don't get upset. Just change the law.'"

Erickson contacted State Rep-



Left to right, Marianne Sussman, Bonnie Sussman (Marianne's mom) and Virginia Cherne bake for Sussman's Bakery. Marianne Sussman was active in getting the Cottage Food Law passed.

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ABOVE: Bonnie Sussman scoops blueberry muffin batter while Virginia Cherne takes rugelach off the cookie sheet.

RIGHT: Raspberry-filled rugelach, a traditional Jewish cookie, baked by the Sussman bakers.



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representative Jim Newberger, a Republican who became a chief author of the bill. At the same time, Twin Cities constituents of DFL State Senator Scott Dibble encouraged him to support the bill. The final legislation could serve as a poster child for bipartisan cooperation. “The Cottage Food Industry has been part of our Minnesota culture for generations,” Newberger said. “It is a great way for people to earn some additional income by doing what they love — cooking delicious foods and bakery items, then selling them to others. I had the honor to partner with members on the other side of the aisle to help bring this industry into the 21st Century. We worked together to remove barriers and ensure safety. We were able to bring all the stakeholders together to get this done. It was a wonderful experience.”

One of the reasons for the broad base of support, not only from both sides of the aisle but also from the Department of

Agriculture, the Department of Health and even the Minnesota Grocers Association, is that the new Minnesota Cottage Food Law also includes some important safety provisions. Previously, any individual could sell nearly any homemade food product, but only on the farm or at a farmers market, and only up to \$5,000 a year. The new legislation more than triples the gross income and supports any form of person-to-person delivery. But it also restricts products to those deemed "nonhazardous," and it requires all Cottage Food preparers to register with the Department of Agriculture and take basic food safety training online. Registration is still free for those who sell up to \$5,000 a year. From \$5,001 to \$18,000, registration is \$50 a year. The law also requires basic food labeling.

Bonnie Sussman, 83, and Virginia Cherne, 72, are two Cottage Food producers forging ahead under the new regulations. As Sussman's Bakery, a consortium of friends and family, they plan to offer staples like brownies and

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muffins, rare finds like rugelach, vegan brownies and Jewish apple cake, as well as some individual specialty items like Cherne's Lemony Apple Cider Caramel Cake. Other members of the consortium are Connie David, 63, and Julie Lindstrom, 47.

With multiple bakers participating, Sussman's Bakery can provide overnight turnaround time on standard items. "If we get an order for a thousand blueberry muffins, we'll all be making blueberry muffins," Cherne said. They also hope to benefit from buying ingredients like cake flour in bulk.

Sussman's Bakery hopes to be in production by the end of July with promotion via word of mouth and on Facebook, Twitter

and Instagram. "I actually have a three-year goal," Cherne said. "I want to get as close to \$1,000 a month as I possibly can."

In addition to the limits imposed by the legislation, Sussman's Bakery won't be offering bread due to the capacity limits of the members' home kitchens — "but if it gets to that point," Cherne said, "I can buy a Viking oven."

Details on the Minnesota Cottage Food Law (and a photo of Sussman's Bakery blueberry muffins) are available on the Minnesota Department of Agriculture website: www.mda.state.mn.us.

Laura French is a freelance writer in St. Paul. Read her "My Job" column every Sunday in the Star Tribune.

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