

# A HUB OF FOOD ACTIVITY

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Early most Monday mornings there's a delightful aroma emanating from Suite 108 at the Grand Traverse Food Innovation Hub. It tells us that Courtney Lorenz is busy in the kitchen brewing up something special. Her business, Cultured Ferments, occupies two small rooms inside this building at 1610 Barlow in Traverse City.

In one of the rooms sits nine 60-gallon plastic fermenting tanks, each holding a waxy substance that completely covers the contents. Her "babies" Lorenz calls them. These are "scobies," and each makes up a symbiotic colony of bacteria and yeast that turns a simple mixture of water, tea and sugar into a delicious and nourishing effervescent drink known as kombucha.

Until moving into the food innovation hub, Cultured Ferments could only sell their kombucha under "cottage food" regulations that restricted sales to farmers markets. In the seven months since moving into the hub, Lorenz has grown her business substantially. "I've expanded from 15 gallons to 540 gallons of production capacity," she says.

This facility is the first food infrastructure project of the Grand Traverse Foodshed Alliance (GTFA). With nine suites available for rent ranging in size from 380 to 1600 square feet, the food innovation hub provides below market rent to qualifying food businesses, along with access to a menu of support services. The "white-boxed" suites are already prepped for the strict requirements of the food industry.

Currently, other tenants occupying suites or pending build-out include; As You Dish, Fab Fresh Foods, the Michigan Hop Alliance, WhiskTC, the Big Dipper Dough Company, Gaijin, Kale Mary, and The Redheads. All these tenants share a desire to grow and expand their local food-based businesses but have met obstacles along the way that the food innovation hub is designed to mitigate.

The entire facility and its philosophy are designed to accelerate the growth of local food businesses and make lasting impacts on the regional economy, and there are more like it popping up all over Michigan.

Back in Suite 108, after Courtney Lorenz finishes bottling a batch of kombucha, she can often be found relaxing with a cup of tea or catching up on email in the lounge area of the food innovation hub. She's convinced moving here was the right choice.

"Being involved with this organization allows any small business to tap into new markets through retail sales, potential distribution partnerships, and local small business resources. As a community member, entrepreneur, and locavore, I couldn't be happier with the opportunities that the food hub is providing our local food economy."

