

# SWAP UP

A MEAL SWAP/MEET UP COMMUNITY

## Trend Analysis

Meal swapping feeds into the current trends of thrifting, recycling, making things yourself, as well as embodies the notion of “eating locally”. Also known as “cottage food,” “artisanal food,” “slow food,” “locally based food,” or “urban agriculture” movements, these movements seek to connect food to local communities, small businesses, and environmental sustainability. Additionally, attitudes towards health, diet, and overall wellness are gaining in popularity and more than ever people are becoming conscious of what they eat and where it comes from.

### Examples of Food Swapping

Currently, there are several examples of food swapping and models for meal sharing: The LA Food Swap Network<sup>i</sup> provides people a way to get in touch with each other and set up their own food swaps. Mealku<sup>ii</sup> is a meal sharing network, which has implemented a meal sharing system in the New York City area. In Los Angeles, two restaurants have embraced the “local food movement”. The restaurant Forage<sup>iii</sup> encourages diners to bring produce from home gardens and incorporates them into meals that day. Additionally, the Silver Lake neighborhood restaurant Sqirl<sup>iv</sup> started out by selling homemade jams and jellies but has expanded to include a full menu of breakfast and lunch foods all retrieved locally.

### Sharing Laws

Homemade food sellers or Cottage Food Operations (CFOs) are on the rise in Southern California due to recently passed legislation<sup>v</sup> on home-cooking-for-profit. The newly passed law, codified in the California Health and Safety Code § 113758 helps to regulate and normalize the model for selling homemade foods. In the spirit of alleviating risk and extending trust between strangers this law includes a list of safe foods for purchase from home kitchens, standardizes the labeling of home cooked food, and imposes a registration process for home cooks. It is not unreasonable to think that in 10 years, legislation will expand to *sharing* home cooked meals just as it is applicable to the *selling* of certain kinds of homemade food now.

### Food Technology

Additionally, technology around food information has proliferated in recent years. For instance apps that share information regarding caloric content<sup>vi</sup>, the implementation of calorie information on fast food and other retail restaurant chain menus, the use of technology in food inventory, and the increased interest on nutritional data from packaged and processed foods. It is clear from these trends that food technology for organic and home-cooked foods is not far off. Additionally, technology mitigating issues related to sanitation and food safety will increase as a result of consumer interest and knowledge of the industry.

## Conclusion

While different forms of *food* sharing currently exist, it is limited to home-grown or foraged foods swapped between individuals. It is usually hyper local and, beyond simple food items like fresh produce, swapping has really only expanded to canned or preserved food or small baked goods. As the meal sharing trend grows, we believe that the ideology around local and slow food movements will bleed over into more organic and sharing based communities like Farmer's markets, co-ops, etc. As consumers veer away from the mass production of food in favor of more nutritional and beneficial advantages of slow and local cuisine, the food sharing model will respond to the current model in ways similar to car sharing and tool lending libraries with an emphasis on conservation, anti-consumption, and \_\_\_\_\_.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.foodswapnetwork.com/> The Food Swap Network is actually a worldwide network, started by two women who now reside in Austin, Texas and Los Angeles, California. They describe the food swap network as a "not-for-profit collective dedicated to promoting food swapping and collective food sharing across the world." Their website gives individuals the tools to begin a swap in their community, but it does not attempt to coordinate the logistics of individual food swaps.

<sup>ii</sup> [www.mealku.com](http://www.mealku.com) Mealku describes itself as "a cooperative network of HomeCooks. We are a 'pay-it-forward' barter exchange in food: The Real Food Network and The Best Way to Eat." They use a form of faux currency called "ku" to aid bartering between individuals. You can earn ku by cooking meals, and spend it on ordering meals from others, or you can use real money to purchase ku. They also use cash as an incentive and reward for those who participate the most.

<sup>iii</sup> [www.foragela.com](http://www.foragela.com)

<sup>iv</sup> [www.sqirlla.com](http://www.sqirlla.com)

<sup>v</sup> The original text of AB1616, "The Cottage Food Act", can be found at:

[http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201120120AB1616](http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201120120AB1616)

For LA County, <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/eh/misc/CAHomemadeFood.htm>

For more on sharing food and the law, refer to: <http://www.shareable.net/blog/the-shareable-food-movement-meets-the-law>

<sup>vi</sup> Fooducate ([www.fooducate.com](http://www.fooducate.com)) is an app which allows a user to scan a UPC barcode on a food item and see good and bad nutritional information and based on the results, the app suggests healthier alternatives.

MyFitnessPal ([www.myfitnesspal.com](http://www.myfitnesspal.com)) is a fitness and diet tracker, which aggregates crowd sourced ingredient and calorie information into a database which allows users to scan a UPC barcode on a food item to search the database and then add it to a personal daily diary.