FOOD SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR PIT OVEN COOKING (HUNGI, KUP-MURRI, UMU, PACHAMANCA)

This guideline provides food safety information for businesses or community groups who intend to cook food using pit oven cooking often referred to as a Hangi (Hungi), Kup-murri, Umu, or Bang-Gaa.

Commercial operators intending to prepare food in this manner must be:

1. An approved off-site caterer; or
2. Hold a temporary food premises licence for the event.

Non-profit organisations (NFPs) must notify Council of any proposed food stall, however will be exempt from requiring a food licence unless cooking on a regular basis (i.e.. 12 or more times a year). NFPs still have obligations under the Food Safety Standards to ensure the safe handling of food as outlined below.

Purchasing food

- Purchase all food from licensed food suppliers to ensure it has been properly handled, prepared and stored safely. Potentially hazardous foods such as meats, seafood, and dairy and processed fruits and/or vegetables must be stored and transported under temperature control (e.g. at 5℃ or below in a refrigerated vehicle or in eskies well stocked with ice).

Food preparation

- A temporary hand washing facility must be provided on-site, at the stall. A water container with a tap placed on a table with a bucket located beneath it to catch waste water will be acceptable. All waste water must be disposed of to sewer (e.g. pour into toilet). Liquid soap and paper towels must also be provided at the hand washing facility.

- All food handlers must wash their hands with soap and running water before handling food, in between handling raw and cooked food and regularly during food processing. The use of disposable gloves is recommended however food handlers are still required to wash their hands regularly.

- All meat should be completely thawed before cooking. Thawing meat in a refrigerator can take 24 – 48 hours depending on the size of meat portions so ask your butcher to thaw the meat for you.

- All food contact surfaces such as cutting boards, benches, food containers and utensils (e.g. knives) must be thoroughly cleaned and sanitised before use. Facilities for washing utensils must be provided if necessary. Use a chemical sanitiser if you do not have access to hot water.

- Prepare the meat as quickly as possible so that it is not left out of the esky for too long. Ensure the pit oven is ready by the time the meat is prepared and wrapped.

- Fresh fruit and vegetables should be washed before processing.

- Meat should be cut into appropriate sized portions to ensure it will be thoroughly cooked in the allocated time. The portions of meat should be similar in size to ensure they are all thoroughly cooked within the same timeframe.

- All food is to be thoroughly wrapped (e.g. with at least 2 layers of aluminium foil) so that it is sealed to prevent contamination by dirt, ash, grass, etc. If the food is to be wrapped in leaves first they must be thoroughly washed prior to use.

The pit oven

The fire and ground oven must be located:

- away from any sewerage or other drainage systems
- away from contaminated land or waste disposal sites
- away from dry foliage or other materials that could start a fire
- so that smoke from fire will not cause a nuisance to nearby residents or businesses

- Any rocks used in the oven must be capable of withstanding extreme heat. Sedimentary rocks and river stones are considered to be unsafe as they may explode or shatter. Volcanic rock or iron bars may also be used.

- The number of rocks used, the size of the fire and the time allowed for heating the rocks must be adequate to ensure the rocks will generate enough sustained heat to thoroughly cook the volume of food being prepared.

- The wrapped food should be placed in the oven in such a way that it can be safely retrieved. It is recommended that a metal rack or wire baskets are used.

- The wrapped food must also be covered with protective layers to separate the food from soil, ash and other contaminants. The protective layer can be made up of non-toxic green leaves, paperbark, hessian bags, cotton sheets or other suitable materials that have been thoroughly washed and soaked in water.

- Once the cooked meat is removed from the pit oven, use a probe thermometer to check the internal temperature. Roast meats must reach the following internal temperatures to ensure they are thoroughly cooked.
    a. Steaks, Roast Beef and Fish at least 63℃
    b. Pork and Poultry/Chicken at least 74℃

Food service area

- A suitable kitchen or stall with a roof, walls and flooring must be available to prepare food after cooking.

- The flooring must be non-slip, impervious and secured to prevent trip hazards (eg. sealed timber boards, linoleum or groundsheets).

- Adequate bench space and cutting boards must be provided to carve the meat and prepare food for service to the public. Benches and cutting boards must be smooth and impervious for effective cleaning and must be cleaned and sanitised before use.

- Use clean and sanitised cutting boards and utensils to prepare the cooked meats.

- Don’t touch ready to eat food with bare hands. Use tongs and other utensils and/or disposable gloves.

- Food must be protected from contamination by customers (e.g. separate the food preparation area from customers and keep foods covered). Self-service foods need sneeze guards and to be effectively supervised.

- A bain-marie can be used to maintain the cooked food hot at a temperature of 60˚C or above.

- All food that is not stored in a refrigerator or food warmer must be used within 4 hours of cooking and disposed of after this time.

Waste disposal

- The food stall must have a lined bin large enough to contain all waste. The bin should have a lid to prevent attracting flies.

General Requirements

- Anyone wishing to proceed with any type of pit oven cooking should contact Mareeba Shire Council's Health & Local Laws section on 1300 308 461 before proceeding.