



The Meal Prep Service

Weekly subscriptions at \$120-180, customers who reorder every Sunday, and a kitchen you rent by the hour. Recurring revenue you can taste.

\$1,500-3,500

START LEAN

14-30 days

FIRST DOLLAR

45-60%

TYPICAL MARGIN

Is this your business?

Meal prep is the subscription business of the food world: clients pay \$120-180 every single week for 10-15 ready-to-eat meals, and a good cook with airtight systems can serve 20-25 of them solo from a rented commercial kitchen. It is the most regulated business in this series and the most recurring. Get the permits right and run one tight weekly cycle (menu, cutoff, cook day, pickup day), and you have revenue that renews itself every Sunday.

\$1,500-3,500

LEAN STARTUP COST

\$4,500-8,000

STANDARD BUILD

14-30 days

TIME TO FIRST DOLLAR

45-60%

TYPICAL GROSS MARGIN

Yes, to ~25 clients

SOLO-FRIENDLY

No (commissary kitchen)

HOME-BASED

BUILT FOR THESE FOUNDER TYPES

THE OPERATOR

THE CRAFTSMAN

4/5 difficulty

THE HONEST FIT TEST

You will cook 250+ meals in a single commissary shift, manage food costs to the dollar, and live by a weekly deadline that never moves. This is operations wearing an apron. If you want to freestyle in a home kitchen, this is legally not that business. If repetition, systems, and a packed walk-in cooler satisfy you, the economics are outstanding.

Who pays, and why now.

The customer for this business has money, no time, and a goal: gym members cutting or bulking, busy professionals who eat takeout five nights a week, new parents, and people under doctor's orders to eat better. They are already spending \$15-20 a meal on delivery apps for food that fights their goals. A local prep service at \$12-15 a meal that hits their macros is not a luxury purchase; it is a cheaper, better version of what they already do.

What makes this model special is the subscription mechanics. A client who orders one week and likes it orders the next week, and the next, because the alternative is going back to deciding twenty meals from scratch. Average client lifetimes of three to six months are normal, and your best clients stay for years. Twenty clients at \$149 a week is roughly \$12,900 a month in revenue that renews by default, which is a number most service businesses need a crew to reach.

The competition splits into two camps you can beat. National mail-order kit companies ship ice packs and chores: the customer still has to cook. Local competitors are usually trainers or cooks running ragged on custom orders for every client. The winning play sits between them: one rotating weekly menu, genuinely good food, macros printed on every label, and a pickup system so smooth it feels like a ritual rather than an errand.

Location math matters more than population. You need a commissary kitchen at a workable hourly rate, two or three gyms or offices that will host pickup coolers, and a 15-minute radius dense with your customer. A mid-size suburb with three CrossFit boxes can outperform a big city where you spend cook-day profits on delivery miles.

WHO BUYS	WHAT THEY PAY	WHAT THEY ACTUALLY WANT
Gym and CrossFit members	\$129-179 per week, 10-14 meals	Macros on the label and results they can see
Busy professionals and parents	\$120-180 per week	Weeknights back, without the delivery-app roulette
Health-driven clients (doctor-motivated)	\$130-170 per week	Consistent portions and ingredients they can trust
Small offices and teams	\$400-900 per week, pooled	A lunch perk that beats catering trays and costs less

THE REORDER CYCLE

52 weeks

Lawn care recurs monthly and pressure washing yearly. Meal prep recurs weekly, which means a single retained client is worth \$6,000-9,000 a year. Everything in this playbook bends toward one outcome: keeping the Sunday order habit alive.

Every dollar, before you spend it.

The startup money goes to legality and logistics, not appliances: the commissary kitchen you rent already owns the equipment. Containers, labels, and cold-chain gear are your real capital line, and the first deposit on kitchen hours is the price of admission.

THE LEAN BUILD · START HERE	WHY IT EARNS ITS PLACE	COST
Commissary kitchen deposit + first hours	Typically \$20-40 per hour; one 8-10 hour cook day per week to start	\$400-800
Health permits + business license	County food establishment permit; varies widely by county	\$150-500
Food manager certification	The serious credential (beyond a handler card); often required for the permit holder	\$100-180
Meal containers + case stock (500-1,000 units)	Microwave-safe, leak-resistant; buy by the case from restaurant suppliers	\$200-400
Labels + thermal printer	Meal name, date, allergens, macros: the label is the product's resume	\$120-250
Coolers and cold-chain gear	Insulated bags and ice packs for transport and pickup points	\$150-300
Liability insurance (first month)	Food business policy; the commissary will require a certificate	\$45-90/mo
LLC + ordering page	Weekly menu, order cutoff, and subscription billing online	\$100-400
Lean total		\$1,265-2,920 all-in

THE STANDARD BUILD · ADD AFTER FIRST REVENUE	WHAT IT UNLOCKS	COST
Chest freezer + second-hand commercial fridge	Buffer stock and staging space that keeps cook day out of chaos	\$400-900
Vacuum sealer + scale station	Portioning speed and shelf life; pays for itself in food cost control	\$150-350
Subscription software upgrade	Auto-renew billing, skip weeks, and cutoff enforcement without spreadsheets	\$30-80/mo
Branded pickup fridge or cooler station	Placed inside a partner gym: your billboard and your distribution in one	\$300-800

THE RULE

Do not sign a lease, buy a food truck, or build a kitchen. Rent hours, rent shelf space in someone's gym, and keep every fixed cost variable until 25 clients force the next step. In food, fixed overhead is what kills new operators: the commissary model exists so you do not feed it.

Clean from day one.

Read this section twice. Meal prep involves perishable, refrigerated, ready-to-eat food, which means cottage food laws that cover bakers almost never cover you. You are a real food establishment in the eyes of your county, and you must set up like one. The good news: the path is well-marked and thousands have walked it.

- Accept that cottage food does not apply:** Cottage food laws cover shelf-stable items. Cooked proteins, rice, and vegetables held cold are potentially hazardous foods in regulatory language, and in nearly every US county they may not legally be produced in a home kitchen for sale. Plan around a licensed kitchen from day one.

- Secure a commissary or commercial kitchen:** Shared-use commissaries, ghost kitchens, restaurant off-hours, and licensed church or community kitchens all work. The kitchen must hold a current health permit, and your agreement with it is paperwork the county will ask to see.

- Get the food establishment permit:** Apply with your county health department. Expect a plan review (menu, processes, your kitchen agreement) and an inspection. Timelines run two to six weeks: start this before anything else with a lead time.

- Certify as a food protection manager:** An accredited food manager certification (the proctored exam, not just the handler card) is required for the person in charge in most jurisdictions. Any cook you later hire needs at least a handler card.

- Label like a professional:** Each meal needs name, production or use-by date, ingredient list, and major allergens. If you make nutrition claims (calories, macros), be able to show how you calculated them. Clear allergen labeling is also your single best liability shield.

- Carry food liability insurance:** A policy covering foodborne illness claims is non-negotiable, and both your commissary and any gym hosting your cooler will require certificates naming them additionally insured.

- Check sales tax on prepared food:** Most states tax prepared meals even when groceries are exempt. Register, collect, and remit from the first order; this is an easy audit and an easy fix.

INSURANCE, SPECIFICALLY

General liability plus product liability covering foodborne illness is the core stack, typically affordable through food-business programs. Add commercial auto coverage the moment deliveries happen in your vehicle, and workers' comp at the first hire: kitchens are exactly where states enforce it.

WATCH FOR

Temperature logs. The entire legal and safety risk of this business lives in the cold chain: cook, chill fast, hold cold, transport cold. Inspectors ask for logs, and a sick-customer claim without logs is indefensible. Log cooling times and fridge temps every cook day from the very first one. It costs five minutes and it is the habit that marks you as a professional.

Requirements vary by state and city. Verify with your state, city clerk, and a licensed professional. Education, not legal advice.

Three doors. Real numbers.

Price per week, not per meal, and put the per-meal math in the pitch: '\$149 a week, twelve meals, that's \$12.40 a meal, less than the burrito place.' Target food costs at 30-35% of price, and protect the subscription: one menu, weekly cutoff, no custom orders at launch.

	RECOMMEND	
<p>DOOR ONE</p> <h3>The Starter Week</h3> <p>\$109 8 meals/week</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ 8 single-serving meals, rotating weekly menu◆ Macros and allergens on every label◆ Sunday pickup at a partner location◆ Skip or cancel any week before cutoff	<p>DOOR TWO</p> <h3>The Full Week</h3> <p>\$149 most-booked</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ 12 meals: lunches and dinners covered◆ Choice of 2 protein swaps per week◆ Macros and allergens on every label◆ Sunday pickup, subscription auto-renews◆ Founding members lock this rate for 6 months	<p>DOOR THREE</p> <h3>The Performance Plan</h3> <p>\$185 premium</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ 15 meals plus 5 snacks or breakfasts◆ Macro targets matched to your coach's numbers◆ Priority menu requests each month◆ Home delivery window included◆ Monthly check-in to adjust portions

PRICING NOTES FOR THIS BUSINESS

- Hold \$11 per meal as your hard floor; below that, food cost plus containers plus kitchen rent leaves you working for wages.
- Enforce the order cutoff (typically Thursday night for a Sunday cook) without exception: your food order and your sanity depend on it.
- Pause-friendly beats cancel-prone: make skipping a week one click, and clients stay subscribed for months longer.
- Raise prices \$10 a tier once you hit 20 clients with a waitlist; the clients who leave over \$10 a week were your churn risk anyway.

THE UPSELL THAT PAYS THE RENT

Breakfasts and snack packs at \$25-40 a week. They ride the same cook day, the same containers, and the same pickup cooler, so the marginal cost is mostly ingredients. A third of clients take the add-on when it is offered at signup, which moves your average order from \$149 toward \$180 without a single new customer.

Names, not strategies.

Your first ten subscribers are inside three gyms within ten minutes of your kitchen. This business launches on partnerships, not ads: one trainer who believes in you can fill half your roster, because their clients are already being told to eat exactly what you cook.

1 Trainers and gym owners first

Offer a free sample week to the trainer plus a referral deal (their first month of meals free, or a flat spiff per subscriber). Trainers prescribe nutrition all day with no way to fulfill it. You are that way.

2 CrossFit boxes and bootcamps

Drop a labeled sample box at the 6 a.m. class with an order card. These communities adopt vendors as part of their identity, and the whiteboard culture spreads your name without you in the room.

3 Offices and breakrooms

One anchor client who works in a 30-person office is a distribution channel. Offer a pooled office plan with one drop-off; lunch is a daily problem every office quietly hates solving.

4 Local Facebook and neighborhood groups

Post the week's menu with real photos every Thursday. Consistent menu posts convert lurkers in week three or four: meal prep is bought after the third impression, not the first.

5 Your own gym, openly

You train somewhere. Tell that community first, sample generously, and let your own visible consistency be the testimonial. The founder eating their own meals is the brand.

THE EXACT ASK

"Hi, I'm [name]: I run [business name], a weekly meal prep service cooked out of a licensed kitchen here in [town]. Twelve meals, macros on every label, pickup Sundays at [gym]. I'm taking ten founding members at \$149 a week locked for six months, and I'd love your honest feedback on the first menu. Want me to bring you two sample meals Thursday?"

THE FOUNDING-CUSTOMER DEAL

Ten founding members: rate locked for six months plus two free sample meals up front, in exchange for a testimonial after week two and a Google review if they stay past week four. Cap it at ten loudly, because your cook day genuinely caps it: real scarcity is the easiest scarcity to sell.

Owned, earned, then paid.

Meal prep marketing is rhythm marketing: the same menu post, the same cutoff reminder, the same pickup ritual, every single week. Trust compounds with repetition. Your growth engine is partner gyms, food photography that looks like food, and a referral loop baked into the subscription.

CHANNEL, RANKED	WHY IT WORKS HERE	THE FIRST MOVE
Partner gyms and trainers	Warm referrals from people clients already pay for advice	Two active partners minimum; sample boxes monthly, spiff per signup
Instagram weekly menu drop	The Thursday menu post is your store opening its doors	Same day, same format, real photos, order link in bio and stories
Google Business Profile	'Meal prep [town]' searchers are ready to subscribe this week	Claim it, load meal photos, collect a review per week at pickup
Referral program	Subscribers know other people with the same problem and the same gym	Give-a-week get-a-week: both sides get \$25 off; print it on every label sheet
Local Facebook groups	Menu posts with prices answer the question people were about to ask	Thursday menu in two groups; answer every comment within the hour

FIVE CONTENT PIECES THAT WIN THIS NICHE

- Cook day time-lapse: 250 meals in eight hours (the operational flex that builds trust)
- What \$149 a week actually buys vs five nights of delivery apps, with receipts
- Macro breakdown of the week's bestseller, label shown on camera
- Client result story: 12 weeks of Sundays, told in their words
- How the pickup ritual works in 30 seconds, filmed at the gym cooler

THE REVIEW MACHINE

Ask at the week-four mark, when the habit has formed and the results are starting: 'You've been with us a month, that means the system is working. Would you share that in a quick Google review? I'll text the link with your pickup reminder.' Reviews that mention specific meals and specific results are the ones that convert gym lurkers into subscribers.

One unit, one month, no fog.

Two honest snapshots: one client-week on the most-booked plan, and a solo month at 18 subscribers. Food cost discipline is the whole game here: at 30-35% you have a business, at 45% you have a hobby that smells great.

ONE UNIT: ONE CLIENT-WEEK, FULL WEEK PLAN (\$149)	AMOUNT	A WORKING MONTH: SOLO, 18 WEEKLY SUBSCRIBERS	AMOUNT
Revenue	\$149.00	Revenue (4 cook weeks)	\$10,700
Food cost (12 meals)	-\$42.00	Food cost	-\$3,100
Containers + labels	-\$9.00	Containers, labels, packaging	-\$640
Kitchen hours share	-\$18.00	Commissary kitchen rent	-\$760
Payment processing	-\$4.50	Insurance, permits, software	-\$210
Gross profit	\$75.50	Marketing + referral credits	-\$180
Tax reserve (27%)	-\$20.50	Pre-tax profit	\$5,810
Yours, per client-week	\$55.00	Tax reserve (27%)	-\$1,570
		Owner take-home	\$4,240

BREAK-EVEN

6-9 client-weeks

Permits, deposits, and container stock are recovered inside the first two or three cook days at even six subscribers. The slower clock is the permit timeline itself: start the county paperwork in week one, because the kitchen cannot legally earn a dollar until it clears.

Illustrative figures at typical market rates; your market, prices, and costs will differ. Run YOUR numbers in the One-Page P&L from THE LAUNCHPAD, Module Six. Remember the 25-30% tax reserve on every dollar of profit.

Pre-decided, so motivation is never consulted.

WEEK ONE: FOUNDATIONS

- County health department called; permit path and timeline confirmed
- Commissary kitchen toured, agreement signed, certificate of insurance bound
- Food manager certification exam scheduled (or passed)
- LLC filed, EIN issued, business bank account open
- Menu format set: one rotating weekly menu, six meals, two proteins

WEEK TWO: DOORS OPEN

- Permit application submitted with kitchen agreement
- Containers, labels, and cold-chain gear ordered by the case
- Ordering page live: plans, cutoff, subscription billing tested
- Two trainer or gym partnerships pitched with sample commitments
- Food costing done per meal; \$11 floor and 35% target verified

WEEK THREE: MOMENTUM

- Full dress-rehearsal cook day run (family and partners eat it)
- Cooling and temp logs started and made habit
- Sample boxes delivered to both partner gyms with order cards
- Founding member offer announced; first subscribers billed
- Thursday menu post rhythm started in two local groups

WEEK FOUR: THE SYSTEM

- First paid cook day and Sunday pickup executed
- Pickup ritual debriefed and tightened (labels, coolers, timing)
- Week-two skip-or-stay messages sent; churn reasons logged
- Referral program printed on every label sheet
- Month-one P&L done; food cost percentage reviewed line by line

DAY 30 VERDICT

Green light: permit in hand or imminent, 8+ founding subscribers, food cost at or under 35%, first pickup day ran clean. Yellow: subscribers but chaotic cook days or 40%+ food cost: fix the prep list and portioning before adding a single client. Red: under 4 subscribers despite two gym partnerships and 25+ direct asks: the menu, price, or pickup location missed; survey every no before cooking another week.

How this business fails, and how it grows.

THE FIVE KILLERS

- ✗ **Cooking from home to 'test it first'**
Selling refrigerated prepared meals from a home kitchen is illegal nearly everywhere and one report ends the business before it starts. Rent the commissary; it costs less than the fine.

- ✗ **Custom meals for every client**
Twenty clients with twenty menus is a restaurant with no dining room. One rotating menu with two protein swaps serves 95% of clients and is the only version a solo operator survives.

- ✗ **Guessing at food costs**
Food cost creeps silently: a \$0.90 per-meal drift across 800 meals a month is \$720 gone. Cost every recipe to the ingredient and re-cost monthly as prices move.

- ✗ **Delivering everywhere to please everyone**
Driving meals across the county turns cook-day profit into gas and hours. The pickup-day model at two partner gyms is the margin; sell delivery only as a premium add-on.

- ✗ **Letting the cutoff slide**
Accepting Friday orders for a Sunday cook wrecks your food order, your portions, and your margins. The cutoff is the system; defend it even when the order is large.

THREE SCALE PATHS

- 1 **The second cook day**
A Wednesday cook and pickup doubles capacity to 40-50 clients on the same kitchen relationship and gives clients fresher food twice a week. This is the natural first expansion and needs no new marketing channel.

- 2 **The corporate lunch channel**
Pooled office plans and small-business lunch programs buy 20-40 meals per drop with one decision maker and one invoice. Two office accounts can equal fifteen retail subscribers with a tenth of the support load.

- 3 **The fridge network**
Branded grab-and-go fridges stocked in partner gyms turn your cook day surplus into retail sales at \$13-15 a meal. Each fridge is a tiny storefront with no staff; five of them is a second business.

YOUR FIRST HIRE

A cook-day assistant for the 8-hour shift once you pass 20 subscribers: portioning, packing, labeling, and dishes while you run the line. They roughly double your meal ceiling for \$120-150 a shift, and they require a handler card and your written prep list. If your cook day is not already a printed checklist with times on it, write that first; it is the difference between hiring help and hiring chaos.

THE STAIRCASE CONTINUES

The playbook is the map. The machine is waiting.

Everything this playbook describes, Epic Advisory Group can build with you: the brand, the cinematic website, the entity, the engine. Describe your idea to the Launch Engine and see your business real in about sixty seconds, free.

- The Launch Engine: your idea, built free, in about a minute
- THE ASCENT: Founder Edition: the eight-module course
- Launch-in-a-Box: entity, brand, site, and first campaign, one flat price
- Growth, capital readiness, and the path to the public markets

"There is no right age. There is only the decision."



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