



# The Osage Café and Mercado

**Mission** To employ underserved young adults and train them in skills to help them succeed in the culinary industry.

**Location** 1015 Osage Street Denver, CO 80204 (Mariposa District)

**Launch Year** 2013

The Osage Café and Mercado is a social enterprise café and training program for underserved youth interested in careers in the culinary industry. The Osage Café, a nonprofit program of **Youth Employment Academy (YEA)**, supports young adults in Denver, helping them break the cycle of generational poverty through education, arts, technology, and employment training.

Youth in the program first participate in a 48-hour classroom-based curriculum that covers knife skills, recipe reading, measuring techniques, food safety, sanitation, and nutrition and receive the **National Restaurant Association's ServSafe certification**. Next, youth complete a 120-hour internship, building practical front- and back-of-house skills in an on-the-job training setting. Skills covered include serving, point of sales, food prep, line cooking, dishwashing, and superior customer service. Youth learn from an Executive Chef who manages the kitchen, ensures food quality, and offers mentorship to aspiring chefs. At the completion of their internship, Osage Café helps youth find placements in permanent jobs or additional post-secondary training. The Café is certified as a green business by the City of Denver strives to operate sustainably for the environment. Osage Mercado accepts SNAP and is a Double-Up Food Bucks distributor.

The Mercado offers staple grocery foods, grab-and-go meals, and convenience items, providing an affordable one-stop-shop for residents and businesses in the redev-

-eloped Mariposa neighborhood. In addition, the Mercado offers catering for events and gatherings of all sizes and needs. These additional services expand our youth's internship education experience, allowing them to learn about preparing grab-and-go foods, nonperishable items, and event catering. **The Osage Kitchen** is the new home of the culinary academy and wholesale operations. Osage Kitchen is able to accommodate up to 15 students within the training space, is available for commissary use by partner organizations, and allows for increased healthy snack and wholesale production.

## Objectives

- 1 Offer youth the foundational knowledge and certification required to succeed in the culinary and customer service industries.
- 2 Offer a safe and supportive environment for youth to explore their professional interests and plan their next career steps.
- 3 Provide supplemental income to youth in the internship program.
- 4 Operate a financially and environmentally sustainable café with high-quality and nutritious food offerings.
- 5 Offer cooking and nutrition classes to the Mariposa community.



## Key Partnerships

- Denver Botanic Gardens
- Colorado Highschool Charter and Denver's School to Work Alliance Program
- Healthy Food for Denver Kids
- Mile High 360
- SNAP Double-Up Food Bucks
- National Restaurant Association

The Osage Café will have close partnerships with many of the planned social enterprises that the Denver Housing Authority (DHA) will develop in the coming years. Osage will serve as a starting point for participants to forge their path through the network, incrementally developing skill sets to ultimately reach their career aspirations. Osage Café's internship offerings now include customer service and cash register training at Decatur Fresh. Osage will also support Decatur Fresh by preparing wholesale grab-and-go items and nonperishables in cans and jars to be sold at the markets.

**Legal Structure** Osage Café and Mercado is an LLC under parent nonprofit Youth Employment Academy (YEA), an affiliate of DHA.

## Short-term Outcomes:

- Participants **increase employment skills**, including hard skills, soft skills, credentials, and workplace readiness and gain on-the-job experience.
- Participants **earn needed income**.
- Osage Café and Mercado is a **thriving social enterprise**.
- The community is **no longer a food desert**.

## Mid-term Outcomes:

- Participants increase employability and labor market competitiveness.
- Participants are stabilized and able to focus on completing training.
- Osage Café makes a profit.
- Community members increase knowledge of healthy cooking and nutrition.

## Long-term Outcomes:

- Participants are matched with unsubsidized jobs that provide a career with a livable wage.
- Participants launch their food businesses through Micro-Restaurant Incubator or Business Incubator.
- Osage Café is a sustainable business.
- Community members increase healthy cooking and eating behaviors.

## Social Media:

**Website:** [osagecafe.org](http://osagecafe.org)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/OsageCafe](https://facebook.com/OsageCafe)

**Instagram:** [@osagecafeandmercado](https://www.instagram.com/osagecafeandmercado)

## Business Information and Hours:

**Cafe:** Monday-Thursday 8am-3pm, Friday 8am-1pm

**Mercado:** Monday-Thursday 8am-4pm, Friday 8am-3pm

**Restaurant:** [720-956-3800](tel:720-956-3800)

**Catering:** [720-956-3804](tel:720-956-3804)

**Email:** [osagecafe@denverhousing.org](mailto:osagecafe@denverhousing.org)

