TIER 2 CERTIFIED · 2025

Volcano Kimchi

Fermentation as a Philosophy — Taking Food Values Into the Kitchen

San Francisco Green Business Program · Restaurant



Rooted in Preservation

Volcano Kimchi has always been rooted in preservation, seasonal flavors, and traditional food culture. Since founding the business in 2014, Aruna Lee has built Volcano Kimchi around plant-based kimchi made with organic, seasonal ingredients sourced from local farmers and farmers market vendors. Fermentation, by nature, is an act of reducing waste — turning peak-season produce into something that lasts for months is sustainability in its most practical form.

When Volcano Kimchi pursued Green Business certification through the San Francisco Green Business Program in 2025, Aruna found that the same philosophy she had applied to her food could go deeper into how the business operates.

BUSINESS PROFILE

LOCATION
San Francisco, CA

SECTOR
Restaurant · Food Producer

FOUNDED
2014

TEAM
5-person operation

CERTIFIED
Tier 2 · 2025

FOUNDER
Aruna Lee

> *"Fermentation is already a form of preservation. Green Business certification helped us carry that same care into the way we run the business."*
>
> — Aruna Lee, Founder · Volcano Kimchi

Making the Kitchen Work Better

For a five-person operation running on tight margins and a full production schedule, sustainability upgrades had to be practical. The certification process gave the team a concrete checklist — refrigeration, lighting, cleaning products, farmers market equipment, water use, and packaging — and coordinator Kevin Kumataka helped them prioritize changes that made sense for their scale. They completed an LED lighting retrofit, switched to EPA Safer Choice certified cleaning products, and identified the walk-in cooler motor as a priority for future replacement.

THREE PROGRAM-SUPPORTED UPGRADES STOOD OUT

Electric Market Battery

Program funds replaced a gas-powered generator for farmers market operations with a cleaner, quieter electric battery.

Reusable Container System

An SF Environment Reuse grant funded a reusable kimchi container system, cutting single-use packaging at markets, the Kimchi Club, and local pickups.

Walk-in Fridge Tune-up

A $1,000 Intuit grant funded overdue refrigeration maintenance from Sam's Refrigeration — contributing to a 15% drop in the energy bill.

The Results

In their first certified year, the impact added up:

5,250
kWh
ENERGY SAVED / YR

4,287
gallons
WATER SAVED / YR

943
lbs · 0.43 $MTCO_2e$
GHG REDUCED / YR

~$1,000
IN ANNUAL UTILITY SAVINGS

$2,700
IN REBATES & GRANTS · $1,700 CITY OF SF + $1,000 INTUIT

What's Next

The walk-in cooler motor is first on the list — Volcano Kimchi is exploring support from SF Environment and local energy-efficiency programs to fund the replacement. Beyond that, the team plans to expand reusable packaging across all sales channels, improve waste diversion tracking, and continue making retail operations more energy-efficient and low-waste.

"Start with the changes that make your work easier and reduce waste at the same time. For small businesses, sustainability has to be practical, affordable, and something your team can actually keep doing."

— **Aruna Lee, Founder · Volcano Kimchi**

Volcano Kimchi is certified through the **San Francisco Green Business Program**, a proud member of the California Green Business Network. **volcanokimchi.com** · Instagram **@volcanokimchi**