

ACCESS

MANITOBA

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Unexpected Diversification

by Lee Gregg

Who would have thought that the microscopic diatom would have such an impact on the cattle industry? As Charlene and Craig Kaartinen of Eriksdale discovered, this hard-shelled organism would diversify their family farm in a way no one expected.

Third generation cattle producers, the Kaartinen's strive to farm as organically as possible. They felt quite fortunate when in 1992 a veterinarian introduced them to a unique and natural product consisting of diatomaceous (die-uh-toe-may-shus) earth (DE). Composed of the fossilized remains of diatoms, the vet claimed that DE would enhance their calves' immune systems, thereby reducing the need for costly antibiotics.

Intrigued, the couple purchased a few bags and added it to their calves' diet. To their delight, they discovered that the calves quit eating dirt – a common problem faced by producers. The calves were healthier and, with no illnesses, the Kaartinen's farm became more profitable.

Dirt harbours bacteria and parasites, and when ingested can cause health problems such as diarrhea, coccidiosis, loss of appetite and weight, or ulcers.



Star Lake Beef DE is not hand fed to calves, but included in their feed. A white nose is the telltale sign that a calf has found the beneficial supplement.

After four years of product testing, the couple was convinced of DE's benefits and shared their success by submitting their story to various Canadian agricultural publications. Soon, they were receiving phone calls from other producers interested in trying the product.

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INNOVATION

Unexpected Diversification

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The Kaartinens tackled the requirements associated with importing the U.S.-produced DE, including obtaining permission from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to sell the product. They were successful and **Star Lake Beef DE** was launched.

By 1999, Star Lake Beef DE enjoyed a sizeable mail order business and soon expanded to include a network of over 400 dealers from coast to coast. With a growing list of distributors, the Kaartinens obtained the exclusive rights to sell the product in Canada in 2002.

As business grew, the couple turned to Deb Falk of the **Super Six Community Futures Development Corporation** for business information and advice. "Having someone at a local rural level is invaluable," said Charlene. "They are familiar with rural problems and know the local people you are doing business with."


Falk encouraged Charlene to attend the **Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba's (WEC) Camp Suc'cessiz' Mine** that offers advanced business training for experienced businesswomen. "It was a wonderful opportunity to meet other women in business," said Charlene. "There was so much information, and getting to know the WEC officers on a personal level meant so much. I can now tap into their expertise as well."

The Kaartinens' goal has been to inform producers of the benefits of using Star Lake Beef DE. "It is very convenient to use," said Craig. "It has proven itself to be a profitable management tool on many farms across Canada."



Charlene, winner of the Home Enterprise 2003 Women Entrepreneur of the Year Award, and Craig Kaartinen.

For information on Star Lake Beef DE, visit their website at: www.starlakebeef.com.

Community Futures Development Corporations and the Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba are members of the Western Canada Business Service Network and are financially supported by Western Economic Diversification Canada. For more information, visit www.wd.gc.ca.

Man

Tusk, Tusk – Nothing Boaring About This

by Lee Gregg

Entrepreneurs have to be self-confident, independent, flexible, creative, knowledgeable, versatile and diligent in order to create a successful business. If these are the benchmarks for success, then Whitemouth entrepreneur Tracy Abraham, president of **Off the Tusk Alternative Meat Selections**, has it in spades.

In October 2002, Abraham began marketing Off the Tusk's unique brand of wild boar meat. With 50 per cent less fat and cholesterol than beef or pork, Abraham offers consumers and industry a lean and delicious dark red meat.

Within a short period of time, Winnipeg's higher-end restaurants were offering Off the Tusk products, as were several local restaurants and grocery stores. An aggressive marketing strategy has successfully launched the company in the United States and a five-year contract was signed with a major Japanese company in early 2003.

Planning for success, Abraham participated in the Self Employment Assistance Program through the **Winnipeg River Brokenhead Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC)**. Working with the CFDC's Jenny Petersen, Abraham received assistance under the CFDC Youth Loan program to purchase much needed equipment, including a truck and livestock trailer necessary to transport her wild boar to market.

"The banks and credit unions were not interested in helping a new business," noted Abraham. "The CFDC provided the assistance I needed to get my business up and running."



Tracy Abraham, winner of the Winnipeg River Brokenhead CFDC 2002/2003 Youth Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

Photo courtesy of Tracy Abraham.

By working closely with consumers and industry partners, Abraham has ensured that her products meet the highest quality standards...and her hard work has paid off. Off the Tusk products were showcased at an Ottawa reception for MPs and Senators, as well as the 2003 Montreal Food Expo.

At the youthful age of 24, Abraham demonstrates that the economic power of entrepreneurship inspires creative individuals to pursue opportunities and take risks.

For additional information on Off the Tusk products, call (204) 348-3177.♣

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Sowing the Seeds for a Stronger Community

by Lee Gregg

When Manitoba's only sugar beet processing plant shut down leaving many Manitoba specialty crop farmers without a crop to grow, **Parent Seed Farms** stepped in with a proposal — grow edible beans and they would buy them. This win-win situation is characteristic of a company that takes pride in their role as corporate citizen.

Founded in 1967 by Norbert Parent Sr., Parent Seed Farms has grown to be Manitoba's leading exporter of dried legumes by recognizing opportunities and acting on them. One such opportunity was Western Economic Diversification Canada's **International Trade Personnel Program** that helped the company hire two graduates to help expand their export markets. Another win-win situation, the grads have secured full-time employment and Parent Seed Farms enjoys export sales of over 90 per cent.

Nestled in the town of St. Joseph, Parent Seed Farms is owned and operated by Parent family members Renald, Robert and Norbert Jr. Along with the responsibility of running a



What started as a seed grains cleaning operation on the second story of a machine shed, has expanded to include nine processing plants and warehouses, and 100 storage bins stretching over 12 acres.

Photo courtesy of Parent Seed Farms.

successful company, the family takes a lead role in sponsorship activities such as the Montcalm Heritage Festival. "Preparing for a festival this size takes a lot of work," noted Renald. "The company not only provides financial assistance, but also manpower and materials to assist with preparing the grounds and buildings."

Renald spent two years as president of the Economic Development Council for Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities (CDEM), lending his business knowledge to other aspiring entrepreneurs. He is currently president of the St. Joseph Museum Committee. Other company officials and staff can also be found lending their support

to many community organizations.

Parent Seed Farms recently earned the "Best in Business Practices Award 2003" by *Manitoba Business Magazine*. This commitment to sound management practices recognizes the responsibilities that come with the honoured position of being an industry leader. ♣