

Minnesota Wild: the "Snowball Effect" of Success and Innovation

The Challenge

Minnesota Wild is a forest products company with a new twist, focusing on non-timber forest products rather than logs and lumber. The company, located in McGregor, Minnesota, takes advantage of Minnesota's abundant natural food resources, selling products such as wild rice, berries, nuts, and herbs available from Minnesota forests.

Like most start-ups, the beginning of the company was an "iffy" proposition. Three out-of-work entrepreneurs with an idea rented a building and equipment to store, process, and market natural forest foods; but banks were reluctant to lend them money to purchase raw materials from the forest. Without these funds, the company could not pay local unemployed residents to collect these products.

The Solution

Thanks to a **\$50,000 economic action grant from the Northeastern Area, State and Private Forestry**, of the U.S. Forest Service, Minnesota Wild was able to purchase, process, and market the hand-harvested, native wild foods to retail and wholesale markets. These federal funds enabled the owners to attract matching funds from a local rural electric cooperative and a county development corporation.

Resulting Benefits

- In the first year of operation, **over 200 local residents** brought produce to Minnesota Wild for cash payments. For many of these unemployed citizens, this was the only money they received during the year.



Popular forest food products distributed by Minnesota Wild.

- **Minnesota Wild has now grown to a company that sells 82 food products**, including wine, jams, syrup, rice, honey, soups, pancake batter, and bread mixes. **The company contracts with about 500 local residents to gather forest products for Minnesota Wild to package and market.**
- Spin-off companies have sprung up. The shipping crates used by Minnesota Wild are made locally by employees of the local Goodwill Industries. Jewelry, willow baskets, birch bark canoe baskets and other crafts made by members of nearby Indian Reservations are sold through Minnesota Wild.

This is another example of how the USDA Forest Service Economic Action Program, by taking informed chances where others won't, yields tangible benefits in terms of new jobs, more diverse economies, and sustainable use of our natural resources.



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