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Food Entrepreneur Assistance Program

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Food Entrepreneur Assistance Program

Abstract

The Food Entrepreneur Assistance Program is a nationally renowned program at the Food Processing Center, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, which helps entrepreneurs introduce food products to the marketplace. The first phase is a one-day From Recipe to Reality seminar that addresses many marketing, business, and technical issues. Following the seminar, affordable fee-based services are available to those participants who decide to launch their own food business. During phase II, From Product to Profit, entrepreneurs receive individualized, step-by-step assistance tailored to their specific business venture.

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There are many questions to be answered before a product reaches the marketplace. Which regulatory agencies govern the food industry? What type of packaging does a product need? How is a competitive price for a product determined? Where can an entrepreneur turn for help? Since 1989, the Food Entrepreneur Assistance Program at the Food Processing Center, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, has been helping entrepreneurs introduce food products to the marketplace.

The Program

First Phase

The first phase of the program is a 1-day *From Recipe to Reality* seminar that is offered at least six times annually. Seminar participants may include people interested in marketing their family's secret recipe, restaurateurs exploring the sale of a house specialty, storeowners contemplating the development of a private label product, or producers considering adding value to an agricultural product.

The seminar is specifically designed to provide entrepreneurs with a general understanding of the many issues involved in developing a food manufacturing business, including:

- Market research and selection
- Product and process development
- Food regulatory issues and agencies
- Packaging and labeling requirements
- Pricing and cost analysis
- Product introduction and sales strategies
- Promotional material packages
- Food safety and sanitation
- Business structure

In 1 day, entrepreneurs gain valuable insight on the basics of starting a food business that might take months to research on their own. According to Center statistics, 75% of the seminar participants *choose not* to start a food manufacturing business after attending the seminar. This is viewed as a success. Making that decision before spending a lot of time, energy, and resources is wise.

Second Phase

Following the seminar, entrepreneurs deciding to launch their own food business may enter the

fee-based *From Product to Profit* phase. During this phase, entrepreneurs receive individualized, step-by-step assistance tailored to their specific business venture from food scientists and food industry business consultants. Depending on the time availability of the entrepreneurs, it may take a year or more before their product is introduced to the marketplace.

Since the program began in 1989, over 1,000 individuals have participated in the seminar. Seventy-four percent of the participants who went on to start a food manufacturing business remain in business today.

Feedback and Success

"We couldn't have started our business without the help of the Food Entrepreneur Assistance program at the University of Nebraska. I would recommend it to anyone wanting to start a food manufacturing business."

Joyce Stoll
Oriental Secrets
Lincoln, Nebraska

"The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Food Processing Center's Food Entrepreneur Assistance program and its wealth of resources and materials were ideal in helping us launch our business dream. The technical knowledge and the personal one-on-one support of the Center's staff were the critical ingredients which helped us overcome the inevitable obstacles and achieve our goals."

Matthew and Marisa Mattox
Pepe's of North America, Ltd.
Las Cruces, New Mexico

"Food scientists and food industry business consultants assisted us with every aspect of getting our liquid coffee concentrate off of the idea board and on the shelf. The entire Program helped us to avoid costly pitfalls and benefited us in so many different areas—packaging, pricing, marketing, scientific data, analysis, contacts and networking. The Food Processing Center continues to be a source of information and assistance as we grow our company."

Jamie Gustafson and Harold Reich
Tenback Inc.
Lincoln, Nebraska

Entrepreneurs from across Nebraska and the nation participate in this program. In 2000, the program expanded by presenting the "Recipe from Reality" seminar in four states. This effort was accomplished by collaborating with other resource providers, universities, institutions, and associations.

Seminar statistics in other states showed the same results as Nebraska, with 75% of the participants making the decision not to start a food manufacturing business after learning about all the issues they would have to consider in developing a food business. Potential food manufacturing entrepreneurs are pleased when they learn about the help available at the Food Processing Center.

Many entrepreneurs have been sitting on the fence, trying to make a decision about whether to start a food business for years. After the seminar participants are delighted to have enough information to finally make a decision. For those deciding not to pursue a food manufacturing business, we often hear comments such as, "Thank you very much. You just saved me a lot of time, energy and resources."

The entrepreneurs deciding to launch a food manufacturing business are thankful that they will have assistance every step of the way until their product is in the market place by entering the *From Product to Profit* phase.

The Food Processing Center also offers services that assist these newly launched entrepreneurial food manufacturing companies and existing food processing companies in improving their efficiency, productivity and profitability. Because each company's needs and goals are very different, the Food Processing Center offers a unique combination of confidential technical and business development services on a project proposal basis. Some of the most commonly requested projects include:

- New product and process development;
- Sensory evaluation; chemical analysis;
- Shelf life studies;
- Production and capacity evaluations;
- Marketing and promotional strategy development;
- Electronic commerce strategies and education;
- Distribution channel research; and
- Identification and targeting of niche markets.

The Food Processing Center has a strong commitment toward expanding the Food Entrepreneur Assistance Program to assist entrepreneurs in other states. Extension educators and other resource providers who wish to learn more about how they can bring the seminar to their state

may contact the author at aburney@unlnotes.unl.edu or phone (402) 472-8930.

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