

Using Native Flora and Fauna to Create a Food Success

CHERIKOFF PTY LTD, THE RARE SPICE COMPANY

Native Australian Foods

Cherikoff Pty Ltd, formerly called Bush Tucker Supply Australia, was started in 1983 by Vic Cherikoff, as a pioneer venture to supplement his native food nutritional research. The company is now a leader in an industry it has virtually created.

Native foods are foods and/or ingredients, once only present in the Australian bush but now grown using organic methods, offer nutritional and functional attributes as well as novel and distinctive flavours for integrating into modern cuisine. In particular, Cherikoff Pty Ltd supplies spices as ingredients for food manufacturers and processors to market products with unique taste characteristics. The regular gourmet range of native foods includes fruits, herbs, spices, seeds, nuts, and distilled food oils, as well as a range of retail products and value-added goods.

This describes how Cherikoff Pty Ltd used innovative techniques to increase the awareness of native Australian foods and develop a successful business providing novel raw and processed products for the local and international markets.

The Opportunity

Following a Bachelor of Applied Science specialising in biochemistry, industrial microbiology and environmental science, Vic Cherikoff spent five years researching clinical pharmacology. He then worked for six years analysing the nutritional composition of native foods, particularly foods used by Australian Aborigines. He devoted his research to analysing and promoting native foods and travelled extensively throughout Australia, collecting food material and traditional information and at the same time, passing the relevance of the nutritional data to outback Aboriginal communities and health workers.

Development of the Opportunity

In 1988, the public interest in his work that he had generated had grown sufficiently to support a successful cottage industry, which provided native foods and relevant application information, on a small scale. Cherikoff Pty Ltd recognised the increasing appeal of native Australian food for modern cuisine, both locally and overseas, and also the potential to easily process and add value to the products. By 1990, the market was growing dramatically and the company moved away from the cottage industry focus to mainstream status in the production of native foods. A major breakthrough came when the company entered into an agreement to provide three flavours for the Goodman Fielder range of Bush Breads.

To promote native foods, Vic Cherikoff wrote school and trade curricula to educate qualified and apprentice chefs on the availability and uses of a myriad of native foods. He also supplied samples of various native foods to chefs to encourage the use of the 'new' Australian ingredients, wrote and self-published several books on native foods and ran regular courses for professionals presenting the use of native foods to over 450 chefs in the first year of the courses.

Cherikoff Pty Ltd has an ongoing commitment to research and development focussed on the functional properties of native foods and works in joint venture arrangements with the CSIRO and Universities to develop and apply food science technologies. Vic Cherikoff also supervises research students at several universities on projects and the universities are involved on a collaborative basis through his involvement in CRC (Collaborative Research Centre) arrangements.

Using Native Flora and Fauna to Create a Food Success

Most recently in its innovative developments, the company has adopted a strategic, incremental approach to introducing ingredients into food manufacture. It is currently positioning its range as part of what it sees as the “new millennium” spice trade in the industrial ingredient market. This offers a significant competitive edge for manufacturers wanting to differentiate their products from the run of the mill.

Critical Success Factors

Vic offered some suggestions for success:

- persistence;
- careful selection of business partners;
- tight contracts ensuring confidentiality;
- the “Godsend” sale, and then the ability to guarantee supply over an extended period;
- innovative marketing focus, through public awareness and the internet; and
- effective business and general management capabilities.

Impact

It is not only the dedicated Australian style outlets using native foods - Chinese, Italian, Thai and French cuisines are embracing the Australian flavours and matching them with their respective, traditional cooking methods. Cherikoff Pty Ltd now supplies over three dozen sustainably harvested native foods, in many different forms, to the global food industry.

Its products are used extensively in breads, biscuits, jams, seasonings, sauces, desserts and beverages and the company is currently growing opportunities in the cosmetics and pharmaceutical markets.

Major successes include the:

- regular supply of 400 restaurants with native food products;
- use of native foods and products by several airlines, railways and cruise ships;
- marketing of native flavoured breads and pastries by mainstream and boutique bakeries; and seasonings by the major retail spice companies
- availability of numerous native influenced products through supermarkets nationally;
- production of ready to use sauces, syrups and seasonings and value added products by boutique and mainstream food manufacturers;
- successful launch of Cherikoff flavours in 330 Sainsbury’s supermarkets in the UK and an amazing response to the products in the USA with imminent penetration of food service, manufacturing and retail markets with appropriate product lines

Using Native Flora and Fauna to Create a Food Success

- and the strong performance of native ingredients in an anti-arthritis preparation for a US customer taking the manufacturing client from a new customer to the largest single customer in 5 months.

Further Information

For further information regarding this case study, Vic Cherikoff may be contacted at:

Cherikoff Pty Ltd the rare spice company
30 Gordon St
ROZELLE NSW 2039
AUSTRALIA
Ph 02 9818 2800
Fax 02 9818 2900
Email vcherikoff@cherikoff.com.au
Web <http://www.cherikoff.com.au/>

Other examples of innovation in the agrifood industries, may be obtained by visiting AFFA's Food Info Australia website, www.affa.gov.au or by email at foodinfo@affa.gov.au