

Kitsaki Claims National Award

Adding Value to Saskatchewan Agriculture

The prestigious Canada Export Award and Aboriginal Business Achievement Award have found a home in La Ronge.

Creating job opportunities and fostering economic development are the main objectives of northern Saskatchewan's Kitsaki Management Limited Partnership.

Operated by the Lac La Ronge First Nation, Kitsaki Management handles the for-profit economic activities of the band and its 7,000 members.

Through careful examination of many potential business opportunities, Kitsaki currently has interests in 11 different companies ranging from trucking to meat processing.

"We are proud of all the businesses we have a share in," said President of Kitsaki Management, Chief Harry Cook. "We only enter into ventures that will result in permanent jobs and positive economic development for the entire community."

By strategically obtaining majority interests in businesses with strong corporate partners, Kitsaki has been able to maximize profits, employment and training opportunities for people in the North.

"Because unemployment is so high in our community, it is a necessity that we continue creating jobs and training opportunities here at Kitsaki," said Chief Cook. "One great way to do that is by selling our goods and services to people outside our community. Kitsaki Meats is one of our companies that has excelled as an exporter."

The recipient of a 2001 Canada Export Award, Kitsaki Meats Ltd. was honoured for its "spirit of innovation and the excellence of its goods and services." Handed out to the top 10 exporting businesses across the country, Kitsaki was the only Saskatchewan firm to receive this prestigious honour.

"We are very proud to be recognized along with so many other great businesses," said General Manager of Kitsaki Meats, Terry Helary. "Receiving the award

has motivated us to be even more."

The food processing company, which is wholly owned by Kitsaki Management, was honoured for its ability to both process and market its own products right to the consumer.

"We now market our products all the way to the consumer," said Helary. "We sell it to wholesalers in Europe as well as to wholesalers and retail companies in the U.S. With the help of trade organizations like STEP,

we have been able to take advantage of many new markets worldwide."

Manufacturing and marketing more than a million pounds of wild rice per year, Kitsaki Meats is the largest grower of organic wild rice in the world and is cashing in on the growing demand for organic produce. Add that to its line of Northern Lights beef jerky, bison products and pork sausage, and Kitsaki Meats is a shining example of economic development on the Lac La Ronge First Nation.

"Having Canada-wide exposure, as well as worldwide exposure, has made all the difference," said Helary. "Growth is tied to finding new customers and in today's world that doesn't just mean in your local community. Today, a business's community is the entire world."

Established in 1983, Kitsaki Meats began as a joint partnership between the Lac La Ronge First Nation and a Saskatoon entrepreneur. The company immediately began shipping packets of it



Chief Harry Cook (right) of the Lac La Ronge First Nation receives the Canada Export Award's Aboriginal Achievement Award from International Trade Minister Pierre Pettigrew at a ceremony in Montreal.

Northern Lights beef jerky across Canada and today fills many orders to Japan.

"The Japanese are big consumers of beef jerky, as are many overseas countries," said Helary. "Because we use Canadian beef, which is superior in quality to what many of the U.S.-based companies use, we have an advantage. Especially since the outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease in England."

Gaining sole ownership of the operation in 1989, the Lac La Ronge First Nation has fostered incredible growth in the business. Now employing over 300 people, Kitsaki Meats has tripled in size over the past 11 years.

"The people we hire are taught a trade here, as well as life skills. For many, this is their first job, so it is very important," said Helary. "I think as we continue to grow and move into other markets globally, Kitsaki Meats will also be improving life locally."