Preserving the Fruits of Innovation: A Scrumptious Partnership with Mill Pond Cannery

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GBC Research and Innovation is always seeking new and meaningful partnerships with the understanding that support for local Small-to-Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is key to promoting innovation in Canada. The Mill Pond Cannery and Preserves Company was incorporated in 2006, when a historic abandoned grist-mill property in Bloomfield, Prince Edward County, was purchased as its founding site. The vision for this privately-owned family business was to establish an innovative small-batch canning and preserves agri-food business that leverages the immense agriculture assets of Ontario, and responds to key issues in today’s market and emerging consumer preferences and concerns. Knowing how important reducing the carbon footprint can be to today’s consumer, Mill Pond determined that local Ontario farmers and producers would be the sole suppliers of the key ingredients for their delicious preserved products.

For a small start-up business, research and development of recipes can present a major challenge. The fledgling company would need to develop and commercialize unique, high-quality agri-food products, using solely Ontario-grown fruits and vegetables, with the inclusion of ‘heirloom’ varieties of fruits and vegetables, and functional food elements wherever possible. Dave Smythe, co-owner of Mill Pond, learned of the excellent work and support provided by GBC’s Culinary Studio during his research to develop a company business plan. He was seeking a collaborative partner to provide assistance with innovative recipe creation and testing, as well as nutritional analysis and labeling.

“My initial meetings with GBC were extremely helpful and informative, and indicated a strong commitment to innovative culinary research, as well as unparalleled knowledge and experience, combined with a rigorous and professional project management-based approach to the initiative,” says Smythe. These characteristics were of significant importance to him in finding an academic partner.

Access to students, faculty expertise, research facilities, and a network of contacts that would otherwise not be easily available, were key for Mill Pond, increasing their opportunity for high quality innovative products and a shorter time-to-market. Since beginning this partnership, GBC is also deriving benefits from its work with Mill Pond, including the ongoing development of its staff and exposure of its students to real-life challenges, which will make them better able to meet the demands of the workforce after graduation.

The success of this project not only benefits GBC students and staff, but it is also enabling the start-up of an innovative small-batch agri-food business that supports local Ontario fruit and vegetable producers and addresses key environmental and healthy food concerns. This proud collaboration is surely a partnership in good taste.

George Brown College, with 30,000 full- and part-time students and more than 900 faculty in more than 150 programs, aims to be a top community college of choice for applied research investment by industry and other partners. Its applied research strengths include advanced engineering and microelectronics; nursing and the social sciences; health informatics; IT; and design and new media. George Brown is currently allied with nine other Ontario colleges in the Colleges Ontario Network for Industry Innovation, started with a $3.5m grant from the Ministry of Research and Innovation. CONII is building college capacity to bring research to the marketplace.