

ONTARIO MARKET INVESTMENT FUND

Building opportunities for Ontario-produced foods

The OMIF program is targeted to promoting consumer awareness of Ontario-produced foods and encourages Ontarians to buy locally.

Pick Ontario Pickles

John and Claudia Jacques, farmers and proprietors of Sunshine Pickles in Thamesville, Ontario, are over the moon about their business these days. They have combined their passions for organic farming and making good, old-fashioned pickles to build a growing business that is increasing the demand for Ontario-grown vegetables and creating jobs.

They grow, harvest, process and pack 23 varieties of pickles for a rapidly expanding Ontario market. From their top-selling pickled asparagus to the zesty green bean variety, all of their products are picked fresh from the field and processed in the farm's own facilities. Half of the pickles are certified organic, all are Kosher, and no additives or preservatives are used in any of them.

It wasn't always such a bright outlook for the business. While much of their product line was selling well in British Columbia and Alberta, the Jacques' had some difficulty breaking into distribution and retail networks in the Ontario market.

However, with assistance from the Ontario Market Investment Fund (OMIF), they are making a breakthrough.

"It seems the stars were aligned and the timing was right," says John Jacques. "The support available through OMIF was the perfect fit with what we were trying to do. We needed help with marketing, sales and promotion, and we got it."

With the assistance of a \$100,000 contribution from OMIF, they were able to hire an experienced marketing professional who introduced them to a variety of marketing strategies to help break down market barriers and grow sales. "The OMIF program is great. We're so pleased to be able to have someone new involved in marketing with us. It helped us see things in a new light," Jacques notes.

Partnerships are proving to be critical to their new business strategy. Sunshine Pickles is now coordinating its promotional activities with its distribution partner, Tree of Life, and hopes to put their products on the shelves of many independent grocery stores, small chains and health food outlets.



A selection of Sunshine Farms' Ontario-produced pickles

With the support of OMIF funding and their distribution partner's expertise, they initiated a number of in-store and trade show product samplings. In Jacques' view, this is a winning strategy. "When the retailer sees first-hand how popular the products are with consumers, they are much more likely to stock them than if we simply tried convincing them."

The OMIF contribution also made it possible for them to participate in a number of large consumer and retail shows to showcase their product. Their pickles have been made directly available to approximately 30,000 consumers at the Good Food Festival and Market in Toronto and to organic food producers, environmentally concerned chefs, consumers and food professionals at the Festival of Fields. On the retail side, they have been to the Grocery Innovations Show and the Canadian Health Food Association's trade show in Toronto.

"When the retailer sees first-hand how popular the products are with consumers, they are much more likely to stock them than if we simply tried convincing them." – John Jacques

A video, store displays, an updated website and in-store advertising flyers, all funded in part through OMIF, complement this marketing activity.

"We really want to push the message that we have great Ontario pickles that are picked, processed and packaged right down on the farm," says Jacques.

The marketing is clearly growing results. Sunshine Pickles has shipped to or finalized ten new Ontario retail accounts in a matter of months, and they are now producing private label products for another distributor in Ontario, the Ontario Natural Food Co-op.

The demand for pickles has also translated into more business for local farmers as well as local jobs. Sunshine Pickles now buys vegetables from its growing partner, Sunshine Asparagus, as well as at least five local farmers. They employ as many as 50 people during their busiest time of year, when the ever-popular asparagus pickles are harvested, processed and bottled in May and June.

As for Ontario sales, the marketing exposure is paying off handsomely. Sales tripled in less than a year. "This is truly amazing. We hoped to maybe double or triple production and sales a year after the OMIF assistance," Jacques notes. "OMIF has been a driving force behind our success. The program recognized that consumers are asking for and wanting more local products and it is helping us meet that demand."

It seems Ontario consumers are sweet on locally produced pickles. With that in mind, Sunshine Pickles is now focusing on new product development, enhancements to its website and networking with farm markets and producers to keep and sustain this phenomenal growth.

Ontario Market Investment Fund

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
1 Stone Road West
Guelph, Ontario N1G 4Y2

Agricultural Information Contact Centre:
1-877-424-1300

Email: omif.omafra@ontario.ca

Northern Regional Office: 1-800-461-6132