

Bringing a Local Harvest to an International Market



BRIGHT IDEAS IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

SYNOPSIS

The Kitasoo/Xai'xais Nation is supporting the local economy with its community-owned seafood company.

LOCATION

Vancouver Island/Coast

POPULATION

517

ECONOMIC BASE

Natural resources, ecotourism, aquaculture, forestry

INNOVATORS

Coast Funds



BACKGROUND

The [Kitasoo/Xai'xais Nation](#) is situated in one of the most remote and isolated communities on the West Coast. Kitasoo Seafoods in Klemtu has been a pillar of employment and industry in the community since 1985, with more than one person from every household working there.

In 2012, the nation identified an opportunity to increase the capacity of the business and diversify its market exposure by developing high-value seafood products. The nation invested in the expansion of infrastructure to allow Kitasoo Seafoods to be able to process its own products and increase both profit margins and product quality.

DIVERSIFYING A COMMUNITY MODEL FOR BUSINESS

Kitasoo Seafoods moved from fishing into processing, creating a new arm of the business called Kitasoo Seafoods



Wild in 2012, in an effort to offer more sustainable, locally harvested seafood and enter a specialized international market. The Wild brand focuses on highly valued wild species, including sea cucumbers, spawn-on-kelp, prawns and salmon.

Kitasoo Seafoods also increased capacity by getting specialized equipment and upgrading its existing facilities into a second processing plant to satisfy Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) regulations and to expand its

processing operations. This change meant the business could also process new species such as live prawns, with higher profit margins.

The ultimate goal of Kitasoo Seafoods is to operate through market shifts and provide stable employment opportunities for the community of Klemtu. "The hope for the business when we started it 30 years ago was to provide employment for people here," said Ben Robinson, chief executive officer of the Kitasoo Development Corporation.





The expansion of Kitasoo Seafoods increases the resiliency of the business and, by extension, local livelihoods. The move to diversify the species caught and processed by Kitasoo Seafoods also helps mitigate this risk.

OUTCOMES

Kitasoo Seafoods and Kitasoo Seafoods Wild provide significant employment and support to the local economy. There were an additional 21 full-time jobs created as part of the expansion and staff retention in the community improved. Kitasoo Seafoods also provides training opportunities for local staff to build their skill set and increase employability, including certification to work in CFIA-regulated facilities.

The inclusion of diverse wild species maintains a cultural connection to saltwater foods that were traditionally harvested by the Nation, such as spawn-on-kelp. Additionally, the expanded plant supports the diversity of the local marine environment and helps to maintain traditional foods used to eat, as well as for social and ceremonial purposes for future generations.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Keeping a certified labour force in Klemtu has been, and remains, a significant challenge. In an effort to ease the pressure, Kitasoo Seafoods works to **create the expertise** needed by **recruiting locally** and **providing training opportunities**.
- Greba also believes Kitasoo Seafoods' unique business approach contributes to its success. By **specializing in products with higher profit margins**, the plant is able to hone in on specific markets and **create high-quality, highly valued products**.
- This approach to **foster the required skills in-house** has been working. In fact, the challenge also has an upside, said Larry Greba, director of Kitasoo Development Corporation. "It means there is employment for almost anyone who wants it in the community."
- "It can be scary to **take the next step** from fishing into processing, but the **results are worth it**," said Greba. "It's like anything. It is a leap. But if you are careful, and if you start small, it's amazing what doors will open."

This article appears courtesy of [Coast Funds](#), and a full version of the story can be viewed on their website.

ABOUT COAST FUNDS

Coast Funds was created to support First Nations in achieving their goals for sustainable economic development and conservation management in the Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii. Coast Funds has approved \$78.5 million toward 337 conservation and sustainable economic development projects.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information about **Kitasoo Seafoods** or **Coast Funds**, visit coastfunds.ca



For more information, visit gov.bc.ca/economicdevelopment

