

Local Tribal Business Looks to Global Markets

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Jennifer Canfield/KMXT

Business is going better than expected for Kodiak's Sun'aq Tribe. After two years of steadily increasing sales for its fish processing and distribution business Kodiak Wildsource, Program Services Director Frank Peterson Jr. says the tribe expects profitability ahead of schedule.

"We're seeing far better numbers than we'd anticipated. Our plan that we'd written for the grant from the Administration for Native Americans didn't show us being profitable until year four and we're in year two and we're hoping that we can beat that by about a year, so year three."

Peterson says a recent trip to the Boston Seafood Show helped them visualize where they want to take their business next. The trip rounded out an 18-month training program with the Alaska Seafood Processor Leadership Institute, which is part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks' Marine Advisory Program. Peterson says they're also making use of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's American Indian Food program. The program's goal is to help American Indian owned businesses export to global markets.

"They'll provide travel, lodging and support for us to attend international shows such as Belgium in April, there's another one in Brazil in June, they just got back from a Tokyo show and there are shows in Singapore and other places throughout the world."

The tribe had been selling to retailers across the country before launching their website in December. Peterson says the site has so far increased their visibility and helped them access individual buyers. While their fresh salmon fillets, smoked black cod and dried fish does appeal to a niche gourmet market, Sun'aq is trying to focus their efforts on volume sales.

"What we really want to do is find the buyer that is interested in purchasing container-loads of our processed salmon. If we get orders for a couple of containers, we're going to be hiring for even more people."

Peterson
says they'll be looking to hire tribal members at the processing plant as
salmon season picks up.