ARCTIC FRESH

Igloolik, Nunavut

Arctic Fresh is a community-based social enterprise operating out of Igloolik. The initial venture was to create a store that could provide groceries and household items at a reasonable cost to the community. A successful model for this developed and the store eventually began to serve customers from across Nunavut through on-line services. Since then the social enterprise has expanded to include a number of other services, including a greenhouse, country food market and local construction company. The ArcticFresh focus is grounded in the IQ principle of pijitsirniq – giving back and serving the community. The stated focus is on the promotion of healthy eating, the creation of impactful community initiatives that improve lives, and opportunities for youth and employment. In 2019, ArcticFresh received the Startup Canada Social Enterprise award.

The store was designed to provide options to Iglulingmiut for cheaper quality food and to promote price competition in the community. The store is able to negotiate better pricing and freight rates through bulk buying. The store is now a model for other communities to use in order to improve local food security and provide better access. Arctic Fresh was successful in negotiating many challenges with federal and territorial legislation in order to receive both NNI and Nutrition North status which allows them to pass along the federal subsidies on food. With this success, they have also started to look at ways to include access to country food products.

Arctic Fresh is working on a modular country food plant that can be built in the south and shipped by sealift, certified by Health Canada and then operate locally in various communities. In the meantime, using the Harvester Support Program model, they have established pilot projects to make country foods more widely available. One pilot involved the subsidization of local harvesters to provide their catch on a 50-50 basis to the store. The subsidy includes costs for harvesting such as gas, ammunition, grub and basic equipment maintenance. The hunter keeps 50% of the harvest and turns over another 50% to the store for resale, thus creating a small business for hunters. Arctic Fresh is looking to provide this opportunity to other communities such as Naujaat for caribou and Arctic Bay and Pond Inlet for whale products, with the goal ofinitiating an inter-community exchange of products for sale through the stores.



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Over the course of time, the idea for a self-sustained modular store grew to include the provision of fresh produce. This involved the inclusion of a year round grow-share greenhouse which is both hydroponic and soil-based. As a way to build knowledge on the consumption of fresh produce, ArcticFresh launched an educational campaign around "eating green", teaching people how to use the produce, providing recipes and tasting opportunities and building capacity through the delivery of cooking classes. In the Arctic Fresh model, 40% of the profits are returned to the community to address food security through sponsorship of Breakfast Programs and food hampers for special events. The remaining 60% goes into innovation and new initiatives such as the modular store development.

Recognition was given to the fact that many community variables contribute to food insecurity – two of the primary ones being unemployment and overcrowded housing. Responding to this need, Arctic Fresh established a for-profit arm. They began doing small renovation projects that enable them to hire many of the local, but underemployed skilled labourers and to provide training-on-the-job to enhance skill sets. The success of the program allowed them to put profits into an expanded model of training. They partnered with an organization out of Winnipeg which brings journeymen trainers into Igloolik to work with apprentices in both on-the-job situations and in classroom-based settings. This partnership also provides the opportunity for some Iglulingmiut to travel to job sites in Manitoba to work on larger scale construction projects.

A further need in the community was identified as support for small business and entrepreneurial ventures. To address this, evening classes in business development have been taking place and have resulted in 4 new business ventures.

The replication of this kind of initiative relies very heavily on a community champion or group of committed champions who understand business and have the capacity to devote to these projects.

Going forward, Arctic Fresh is looking to develop partnerships with other communities, especially those communities most food insecure and with the fewest resources to be able to address those issues. They hope to target Grise Fiord and Arctic Bay as new start-ups for the self-sustaining store model. The ultimate goal is to support communities at first and to gradually step back and allow the stores to run independently.



