

# RESEARCH CONNECTION

## Commercializing food development innovation in Manitoba

By Gillian Richards, Ph.D.



### Why this research is important

In the food processing sector, innovation is essential for maintaining competitiveness with lower costs and perceived uniqueness in the rapidly globalizing world. After seven years of a processed food trade deficit with the USA between 2009 and 2015, Canadian companies emerged in 2016 with a \$165M (CAD) surplus compared with a \$1B deficit the previous year. The challenge, as reported by the Conference Board of Canada in 2012, is an “innovation gap” largely related to commercialization. Simply put, there are not enough new ideas being brought to market. Adding new knowledge to our understanding of the nature of innovation in the food processing sector adds depth to the discourse and insight into how to support and accelerate the

### What you need to know

This research examines the food processing sector and builds on previous research efforts by the Rural Development Institute to better understand innovation. This research reveals the anatomy of innovation through examination of the actual experiences of successful innovators, as well as the suppliers and trusted support firms they worked with along the way. From an in-depth examination of five different food innovations in Manitoba, the innovators took unique paths to translate their ideas into sales.

commercialization of innovation. After scanning the many sectors in Canada, it is the food sector that Balsillie (2017) distinguishes as most promising. When coupled with technology innovation, this sector can inform and fuel the 21st century across Canada and globally.

### How the research was conducted

To garner key insights from those directly involved with the commercialization of food innovations, a qualitative research approach on exploratory case studies was used to answer the primary research question: How does commercialization of a food processing innovation occur in rural Manitoba? To respond to this question, four

specific elements of the anatomy of innovation were examined, including:

1. How did commercialization occur?
2. Who supported the innovator with what?
3. What barriers occurred in commercializing the innovations?
4. What leadership skills were critical to successfully commercialize a food innovation?

### What the researchers found

The findings in this research raised four major points in the discussion on commercializing innovation in Manitoba. First, while models of commercialization are traditionally conceptualized as being linear, whereby the activities that occur from ideas to sales happen sequentially, the commercialization activities (e.g., market research, planning, and financing) were consistently found to occur simultaneously. Second, business and food processing supports were essential in moving prototypes to higher levels of production by assisting in arranging financing, executing product and process development, and scaling up to commercial volumes. Third, leadership was consistently found to be fundamental to entrepreneurship and was identified in all five cases as essential to commercializing innovation in food processing. Lastly, while innovation was evident in each of the five case studies, there was no explicit mention of businesses intentionally fostering a culture of innovation.

### How this research can be used

From an in-depth examination of five different food innovations coupled with the above comparative analyses, a response to how innovation in food processing is commercialized today in Manitoba clearly rests on investing resources and developing leadership skills. When taken together, the above analyses suggest

innovators need to provide their innovation at the same time develop marketing and organizational aspects.

### About the researchers

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### Keywords

innovation; commercialization; food processing; business

### Publications based on this research

Ashton, W., Richards, G., & Warrener, S. (2017, September). From ideas to sales: Commercializing food processing innovation in Manitoba. Brandon, Manitoba, Canada: Rural Development Institute, Brandon University.

<https://www.brandonu.ca/rdi/publication/from-ideas-to-sales-commercialising-food-processing-innovation-in-manitoba/>

### Acknowledgements

Thanks to all five innovators and all the innovation partners and industry stakeholders who participated in this research. Also, thanks to the members of the research steering committee.

This research was supported and funded by Growing Forward 2.

Research Connection is a periodical publication intended to provide information about the impact of Brandon University's academic research and expertise on public policy, social programming, and professional practice. This summary is supported by the Office of Research Services and by the Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies, Faculty of Education.

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