

Seed funding helps agrifood companies get off the ground

The funding, provided through the Ontario Seed Fund, helps businesses expand and make upgrades



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Up to 55 agriculture and food businesses in Southern Ontario are getting a helping hand through the Ontario Seed Fund delivered by Bioenterprise, a not-for-profit business accelerator in Guelph.

In the first round of funding in 2016, 16 businesses were successful in obtaining \$30,000 each in matching seed funding along with access to mentoring services. The funding comes through the Federal Economic Development

Agency for Southern Ontario (Fed Dev).

Two of the successful applicants were Rootham Gourmet Preserves and Escarpment Laboratories, both located in Guelph.

Rootham Gourmet Preserves, owned by Will Rootham-Roberts, specializes in making jams, condiments, and pickles using local ingredients. They used the seed funding to reach out to 700 Ontario farmers who have a retail presence.

In addition to purchasing ingredients from local farmers for their own line products, Rootham makes products for farmers which they can sell in the off-season. Rootham-Roberts said they can work with farmers to develop the products and provide assistance in creating labels that meet the requirements for nutritional content and French/English.

As a result of the seed funding, 45 farmers toured the Rootham facility which resulted in 20 more products being added

to their line-up, doubling their co-pack sales.

Rootham-Roberts, who took over the company his mother started in 1983, said his business caters to all sizes. Whether you want a run of 600 or 6,000 jars, once a year or every few weeks, they can handle it, he said.

“We are a microprocessing plant with all the food certifications of a big plant.” Up to 3,000 jars per day can be processed in the automated 5,000-square foot federally-inspected facility.

In total, Rootham makes about 100 products. Their own line with the familiar green and gold label is a staple in 250 specialty food and gift shops. Rootham also developed a private label for the Longo grocery store chain in the Toronto area.

Their products, which stress quality and affordability, are popular for entertaining and for Christmas gifts, said Rootham-Roberts. “Our busiest season is from September to Christmas.”

The next step is to make a line of shelf-stable healthy preserves using maple syrup and honey instead of refined sugar.

For more information on Rootham Gourmet Preserves or the co-pack services they offer, go to www.roothams-gourmet.com.

ACROSS TOWN, Escarpment Laboratories specializes in supplying craft breweries across Canada with liquid yeast including wild strains not available elsewhere.

Different types of yeast create different flavour profiles in beer, something craft brewers are looking for, said Richard Preiss who founded Escarpment Laboratories along with Angus Ross and Nate Ferguson.

The seed money was used to help fund their expansion from a pilot located inside a brewery to having their own dedicated facility.

Incorporated in 2015, the young company has about 30 strains and blends of yeast on offer, with another 800 in their collection. They continue to expand their knowledge of the yeast strains, for example by tracking the impact of temperature on the flavour compounds produced.

While there are many companies that supply dry yeast, Preiss said the company is the



Will Rootham-Roberts, owner of Rootham Gourmet Preserves in Guelph, is shown with his mother, Marilyn, who started the company in 1983

only one that produces liquid yeast. Grown to order, Preiss said liquid yeast has not been stressed by the drying process and is pure and healthy.

Craft breweries need to be consistent and hit their targets every time.”

— Richard Preiss

Craft brewers are also able to buy liquid yeast in smaller quantities than what is available for dry yeasts.

In addition to yeast sales, Escarpment Laboratories offers quality control services to craft breweries. Craft breweries need to be consistent and “hit their targets every time,” said Preiss.

Escarpment Laboratories

has also worked with a few cideries and distillers as well as craft beer breweries.

The complete list of seed funding recipients can be found on the website for Bioenterprise. The deadline for applying for the final round of funding through the Ontario Seed Fund is in February. For more information, go to www.bioenterprise.ca.

Bioenterprise, which is funded through Growing Forward 2, also offers many services at a subsidized rate to entrepreneurs. These services include concept evaluation, market analysis, marketing strategy development, regulatory compliance and writing grant applications.

In addition to client fees and government funding, Bioenterprise, which delivers several programs across Canada, is funded through corporate memberships and sponsorships.



Richard Preiss, one of the founders of Escarpment Laboratories in Guelph, which received seed funding through Bioenterprise to expand their liquid yeast facility

Grass-fed cheese



Earlton-area dairy farmers Simon Gravel and Tammy Sansoucy-Gravel are producing milk to make Canada's First 'Verified Grass-Fed Cheese' at Thornloe Cheese. After 18 months of discussions and transition Thornloe Cheese recently featured its first batch of cheese in stores. Pride of the North Grass-Fed Cheddar and Mozzarella will be made from verified grass-fed cows from Temiskaming Valley. Seven Temiskaming-area farm families are presently participating in the project. (PHOTO BY SHARON GROSE)