



CLIENT STORIES

MENDOCINO COAST OFFICE
760 B Stewart St, Fort Bragg, CA 95437
PHONE (707) 964-7571 • FAX (707) 964-7576

MENDOCINO INLAND OFFICE
631 S. Orchard, Ukiah, CA 95482
PHONE (707) 467-5931 • FAX (707) 467-5930

GLENN COUNTY OFFICE
420 W Walker St., Orland, CA 95963
PHONE (530) 990-5801



County Business Carves A Niche With Seaweed

By Kathy Brigham

Larry Knowles is certainly not the first person to find a use for the bounty of sea vegetables to be found along the Mendocino coast. Native Americans have been

West Company Client Stories – Rising Tide Seaweed

harvesting seaweed for centuries and inland peoples once traded their most precious possessions for a bag of dried seaweed laboriously carried from the coast.

But Knowles and his company -- Rising Tide Sea Vegetables #-- have developed a unique product niche: healthy treats for humans and other animals. Among their products, Rising Tide sells maple kelp crunch bars that people like to eat and feather boa seaweed that bears, fish, and otters like to flip, nibble or bat around for hours.

Knowles acquired Rising Tide from Kate Marianchild in 2006. In 2008, Knowles and his business manager, Marla Greenway, began receiving consulting services from the Mendocino Small Business Development Center operated by West Company. SBDC consultant Michael Carroll worked with Rising Tide to identify weak and strong products, calculate healthier profit margins, and balance cash flow. The most striking thing Knowles and Greenway learned from this analysis was that one of their most popular products -- their Maple Kelp Crunch bars -- was being sold at a loss.

The problem was that the bars were being made by a company on the east coast and, then, labeled and distributed by Rising Tide. Knowles resolved to find a way to manufacture the bars himself. First, he purchased the assets of a commercial business in Fort Bragg, including a large commercial baking oven. Then, he partnered with a professional baker -- Odile Perkins of Odile's Delights -- to develop his own recipe for the product. After much research and experimentation, they were able to achieve the taste and quality they wanted while keeping costs down to profitable level.

West Company Client Stories – Rising Tide Seaweed

“Initially, we thought we might have to discontinue the organic energy bar line,” says Greenway. “This wasn’t a happy prospect. But now -- as a result of our consulting with Michael – we’re very excited and optimistic about the future of our snack product line.”

Rising Tide will be renaming the maple kelp bars, as part of their agreement with the original manufacturer, and the bars will be on the market soon. Meanwhile, they now have a development process that will allow them to add new products in this category, notes Carroll.

As a further consequence of consulting with West/SBDC, Knowles was encouraged to develop an offshoot business: a commercial, shared-use community kitchen known, affectionately, as “Chubby’s.” According to Greenway, “The assistance and education we’ve received from Michael for this new project has been invaluable.”

And, in their not-for-human-consumption line, there is the very nichiest of niches represented by its Feather Boa product. Otherwise known as *Egregia Menziesii*, Feather Boa is a seaweed too tough for humans but much loved by bears, fish, and otters, among others. And, like other seaweeds, the Feather Boa is packed with nutrients. Rising Tide has marketed its seaweed to zoos for years as a natural, behavior-enhancing edible toy.

Susan Garrett, from the Lake Superior Zoo, noted that their polar bears, reef fish, and North American river otters all enjoy the Feather Boa. “The seaweed fascinated the

West Company Client Stories – Rising Tide Seaweed

polar bears” says Garrett. “Initially, they were not sure what to do with it but soon both bears jumped into the water and grabbed a piece. Bubba remained in the water the whole time and swallowed his down rather quickly. Berlin brought hers up onto a rock and took her time with it, quite obviously relishing the treat.”

In addition to tasting good, seaweed is said to have a number of health benefits. “Kelp’s rich supply of nutrients from the sea has a buffering ability to neutralize wastes from body fluids so they can more easily be discharged from the body,” says Greenway. “It improves digestion, stimulates kidney function, increases circulation, and purifies the blood. Studies have shown that kelp is able to absorb and remove drugs, chemicals, heavy metals, and, even, radioactive strontium from the human or animal body.”

Those of us who don’t have a polar bear in the family can enjoy Rising Tide’s other treats, including crunch bars, by visiting Ukiah Natural Foods in Ukiah, Mariposa Market in Willits, or Corners of the Mouth, Harvest Market, Living Light, or Down Home Foods on the Coast.



And look for Rising Tide’s Kombu seaweed in the new Disney remake of “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice,” due out next year. The Kombu has a bit part as set dressing for a “giant herb” scene. Hey! It’s work!

West Company Client Stories – Rising Tide Seaweed

Rising Tide Sea Vegetables can be reached at 964-5663, risingtide@mcn.org or www.loveseaweed.com.

West Company/Mendocino SBDC/Women’s Business Center have offices in Fort Bragg (760B Stewart Street, 964-7571) and Ukiah (631 S. Orchard Street, 462-5931) and a web page at www.westcompany.org . Kathy Brigham is a member of the West Company Board of Directors.



Small Business
Development Center
Mendocino