



FRONTIER CENTRE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Profile Series

Profile of:

LENNY O'MEARA

" It's just a matter of Indigenous people getting the support and building an industry, "

Lenny O'Meara – an Indigenous Australian entrepreneur and business leader – believes that Indigenous people can make a living by adding value to activities they have always done.



“For Indigenous people, gubinge is a good source of income and if it’s managed right it can be a big and profitable business,” said the co-founder and owner of Kimberley Wild Gubinge, in a 2017 Weather News story on the Australian Willy Weather online site.

“It’s just a matter of Indigenous people getting the support and building an industry,” he said, expressing his belief that tapping into the industry can economically empower Indigenous communities. This is especially important given that the bush fruit grows wild and does not even need to be grown. Indigenous people just need to harvest it.

He and his partner Jacinta Monck founded the harvesting business in 2015 to harvest gubinge fruit (a bush fruit more commonly known by its English name Kakadu plum), process it and then market and sell the finished product which is powdered form prized for its vitamin C content.

O'Meara and Monck have taken advantage of a staple bushfood for Indigenous people across northern Australia to now become the only commercial producer of dried gubinge powder in their region. Thanks to their efforts, the fruit has also become much better known within the health food

industry, which has opened them up to lucrative opportunities.

Typically, Indigenous communities on the far north of Australia harvest the fruit known to have more vitamin C content than most other fruits in the world (it has about 46 times more vitamin c content per gram than a typical orange). It grows between the Dampier Peninsula and eastern Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory.

The former pearl diver, opal diver, camel rider, and Indigenous guide said that prior to establishing his business, his family were harvesters for a company based in Melbourne. They lived very remotely, being 180 kilometres away from the nearest major town. Frustration with that business arrangement led he and his partner to start the new venture.

“We were driving to Broome to deliver our fruit and along the way it’s a bumpy dirt track and the fruit gets tossed around, plus in the wet season the roads are slippery and dangerous and we thought ‘We are tired of doing this’. We decided we could probably value add and form our own company and start processing the fruit,” he said in the interview with the Sydney Morning Herald.

“We decided to put all our money into machinery and take the big leap,” recalled O'Meara, saying that he and his partner put \$30,000 from that year’s harvest to buy the necessary equipment, which included a dehydrator, milling machinery, pulping machine, and a deseeding machine.

O'Meara is part of a demographic that faces challenges in accessing financing for business. Research into Indigenous Australian entrepreneurship shows that Indigenous people face several obstacles in business financing. A 2017 study by the Centre for Independent Studies – an Australian pro-market think tank – found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have less personal funds to start or grow

an SME than their non-Indigenous counterparts. The average total gross personal income of an Indigenous man is 55 per cent of his non-Indigenous counterpart. The study also found that Indigenous Australians had less access to housing collateral than non-Indigenous people. Home ownership is a major source of collateral for bank financing for most new business start-ups. O'Meara said the business idea came after he and his partner Jacinta decided to return to his Indigenous ancestral land back in 1999.

"We wanted to take care of the country, and let the country take care of us," he said, in an interview on the Australian Good Food website.



O'Meara – like most Indigenous entrepreneurs and business leaders in Australia and elsewhere – is intensely interested in improving the conditions of his fellow Indigenous people. In 2017, he established a partnership between Kimberley Wild Gubinge and credit card giant Mastercard and First Australians Capital, an organization committed to enabling Indigenous entrepreneurs and enterprises. The partnership enables Aboriginal entrepreneurs from up to 30 businesses to access the Murra Program at Melbourne Business School. Melbourne Business School is the graduate business school of the University of Melbourne in Victoria, Australia. The Indigenous entrepreneurs selected for the program can access MBA-level classes and have access to business mentorship and

networking opportunities.

Helping Indigenous entrepreneurs often helps close the gap for Indigenous communities. Research by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at Australian National University found that Indigenous businesses are 100 times more likely to employ other Indigenous people.

In the meantime, the partners said in a February 2018 news story by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) that they hope the processing plant they have established will enable the local industry and help empower Indigenous communities with more economic opportunities. The partners have also been experimenting with new products derived from the bush fruit given its anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory properties.



203-2727 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada R3J 0R2

Tel: 204-957-1567

Email: manitoba@fcpp.org

The Frontier Centre for Public Policy is an independent, non-profit organization that undertakes research and education in support of economic growth and social outcomes that will enhance the quality of life in our communities. Through a variety of publications and public forums, Frontier explores policy innovations required to make the prairie region a winner in the open economy. It also provides new insights into solving important issues facing our cities, towns and provinces. These include improving the performance of public expenditures in important areas such as local government, education, health and social policy. The author(s) of this study have worked independently and the opinions expressed are therefore their own, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the board of the Frontier Centre for Public Policy.

Copyright © 2019 by the Frontier Centre for Public Policy.

Profile Series No.23 • Date of First Issue: March 2018.

Reproduced here with permission of the author(s). Any errors or omissions and the accuracy and completeness of this paper remain the responsibility of the author(s).

ISSN 1491-78

Ideas that change your world / www.fcpp.org



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Joseph Quesnel is a research fellow for the Frontier Centre for Public Policy who mainly focuses on Aboriginal matters and property rights. Presently based in eastern Nova Scotia, he is from northeastern Ontario and has Métis ancestry from Quebec.

He graduated from McGill University in 2001, where he majored in political science and history. He specialized in Canadian and U.S. politics, with an emphasis on constitutional law. He also has a Master of Journalism degree from Carleton University, where he specialized in political reporting. His master's research project focused on reformist Indigenous thinkers in Canada.

He is currently studying theology at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax.

In the past while as a policy analyst, he was the lead researcher on the Frontier Centre's flagship Aboriginal Governance Index, which is measured perceptions of quality of governance and services on Prairie First Nations. For over two years, he covered House standing committees as well as Senate committees. Quesnel's career in journalism includes several stints at community newspapers in Northern Ontario, including in Sudbury and Espanola. He also completed a radio broadcasting internship at CFRA 580 AM, a talk radio station in Ottawa, and the well-known Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC).

He is a past editor of C2C Journal, an online Canadian publication devoted to political commentary. He wrote a weekly column for the Winnipeg Sun and contributes to The Taxpayer, the flagship publication of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

Quesnel's policy commentaries have appeared all over Canada, including the Globe and Mail, the National Post, the Financial Post, the Vancouver Sun, the Ottawa Citizen, the Montreal Gazette, the Calgary Herald, Winnipeg Free Press, among many other major papers. Over the years, he has been featured as a guest commentator on many radio and television news programs.