

WOOFABLES USES COVID-19 SLUMP TO PLAN FUTURE GROWTH

ABOUT WOOFABLES, THE GOURMET DOG BAKERY. Woofables, established in 2004, is located in Coralville, Iowa. This woman-owned business has 35 employees. Woofables is a gourmet dog treat baking company producing personalized service to its boutique clients and also providing standardized products for retail markets

THE CHALLENGE. CIRAS strategic adviser Joy Donald said the bakery had been dividing its effort between giving extremely personalized service to its boutique clients and also providing more standardized products for retail markets. Serving both markets limited growth, because the boutique work took time away from the large-volume, more generalized products desired by big stores.

"They were serving both of them but the needs of those two segments were conflicting with each other," said CIRAS project manager C.J. Osborn. "The skills that you need to serve one are quite different than what you need to serve the other. It became unwieldy." Co-owner Laura Taylor decided to take advantage of a deep, pandemic-driven lull in business last year to launch a substantial review of the company. She contacted CIRAS, part of the MEP National Network™, for help with a new strategic plan and a reevaluation of where Woofables belongs in its industry.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. Using funds from the CARES Act, CIRAS worked with an outside consultant to analyze the \$4 billion pet treats industry. It soon became apparent that there was more than enough growth potential to justify a major Woofables expansion.

In the second half of 2020, the company began assembling the people and equipment necessary to expand both its pet store and grocery businesses. While Donald assisted Woofables with recruiting new executives, CIRAS strategic advisor Steve Wilson and project manager Troy Crowe began working with Woofables on a value-stream mapping project to help make the company as efficient as possible on both production lines. CIRAS project manager Paul Gormley also has been advising the company on necessary steps to improve its e-commerce platform so Woofables can grow its online business as well.

"The market is there. If we hadn't gone through this process with CIRAS, we probably would have continued on the same path, showing nice decent growth every year. But it wouldn't have been focused, and it wouldn't be with a plan. Now, we're developing a plan, and we have a specific target in mind. I would recommend CIRAS to other companies. This has been a very positive experience for Woofables. We have a much better understanding of our market and how we can expand successfully. This gives us the direction and confidence to make the necessary investments for greater growth."

-Laura Talor, Owner and Top Dog

RESULTS



MEP grant, COVID Cares



7 jobs created



\$3,000,000 in increased sales



\$72,000 invested in plant equipment, information systems, workforce

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