

## GROWTH IN THE SALSA MARKET FOR ZUNIGA

**ABOUT ZUNIGA FOODS.** Zuniga Salsa is a woman-led, family-owned business based in Tigard, Oregon, specializing in crafting fresh, flavorful salsas. Founded by the Sibelian-Zuniga family, the company draws on traditional recipes and a love for bold flavors passed down through generations. Known for sourcing local produce, Zuniga Salsa creates small-batch products that celebrate the unique flavors of Oregon's fresh tomatoes, peppers, onions, and herbs.

**THE CHALLENGE.** Zuniga Salsa faced significant challenges during the pandemic, including staffing difficulties and a change in family ownership. Compounding these issues, Zuniga learned that its largest customer, Whole Foods, required it to obtain FSMA, HACCP, and GMP certifications by the end of 2023 to retain its business. This certification was also crucial for expanding distribution to other retailers and scaling production capacity. Zuniga recognized that it urgently needed to transform its market approach, operational efficiency, compliance standards, and overall strategic direction. The company risked losing its major customer, which could ultimately lead to going out of business. When Zuniga began working with the Oregon Manufacturing Extension Partnership (OMEP), part of the MEP National Network™, its annual revenue was approximately \$900,000, with a team of nine employees.

**MEP CENTER'S ROLE.** OMEP and Zuniga collaborated to complete a current-state Value Stream Map (VSM) and design a future-state (FS) VSM, essential for meeting compliance and certification requirements for GMP and FSMA audits. The FS VSM highlighted necessary facility, process, inventory, scheduling, takt time, standard work documentation, and policy changes to achieve operational excellence and certification readiness. As a result of these initiatives, Zuniga's facility gained a projected 50% additional capacity. OMEP partnered with TechHelp, also part of the MEP National Network™, to develop standard work documentation. Additionally, OMEP utilized internal staff to create SOPs and training materials across various formats, including written, video (84 videos), and a cloud-based LMS. Zuniga invested in facility upgrades, new equipment, improved process controls, and an expanded training program. To ease financial strain, OMEP helped Zuniga secure a \$75,000 SBSF grant from Business Oregon. These efforts led to a successful GMP/FSMA audit with a high score of 96.6—the auditor's highest in over a year.

Market research revealed growth potential in wholesale distribution, particularly in hospitality, education, and food service sectors. Zuniga expanded distribution with gallon-sized containers and identified a regional advantage as most fresh salsa sold in the Northwest originates from Southern California. With lower production costs than competitors, Zuniga is well-positioned to gain shelf space and recapture wholesale margins.

"Our OMEP consultant John Valachovic is one of my favorite human beings and without him and the entire OMEP team Zuniga would not be in business today."

-Karla Lawrence, CEO

## RESULTS



9 jobs retained, 4 new jobs



\$9,000,000 retained and \$5,000,000 new sales



\$75,000 Business Oregon SBSF Grant for new equipment



50% productivity improvement



New food service markets in Seattle and Northern California

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