

Spike in Profits for Cheri's Desert Harvest

Based in Tucson, Arizona, Cheri's Desert Harvest is a food manufacturing company that produces all-natural and organic preserves, candy, syrup and quick mixes made from local, indigenous fruits and vegetables. Founder and President Cheri talks us through the unique selection of products her firm creates and how it works to educate and advise clients on the wonders of the innovative plants she uses. The firm recently won the Best Food & Beverage Entrepreneur – Arizona award.

Since its establishment in 1985 Cheri's Desert Harvest has been creating innovative products which are made with fresh fruit and vegetables that are grown and hand harvested locally in the Sonoran Desert. Using fresh ingredients and processing them in the firm's facility creates a finished product with exceptional flavour and nutrient values, with ingredients including prickly pear cactus fruit, citrus, peppers of many varieties and several local honeys all used to create unique and delicious foodstuffs.

In addition to Cheri's food manufacturing business, Cheri decided to find ways of using all parts of the certified organic prickly pear cactus fruit, the largest fruit crop that she uses for her preserves. Utilizing leftover juice to dye clothing spawned a new apparel business, and the seeds from the waste of the cactus fruit is separated, cleaned and processed to obtain a rich, anti-aging oil for the cosmetic industry. As such new, unique products have been created from nature, reducing waste and fuelling the local economy, as Cheri describes.

"Being stewards of our environment, we have developed two side businesses in different industries by utilising every part of the cactus fruit we harvest for CDH. Excess fruit is now being used to dye apparel for the clothing industry and the seeds from the waste is collected, cleaned and processed to extract the valuable oil within them for the cosmetic industry. Waste from this process is then used as an ingredient for animal feed in our zoos. We have developed processes to use all parts of this nutritional fruit that have never been explored before. These creative products can be found in tourist venues and department stores and are constantly increasing in popularity, which is a testimony to the quality of the products we offer."

As a former Teacher Cheri is dedicated to supporting clients and helping them to learn about the various flora that can be found right on their doorstep, as she outlines.

"As a former educator, I enjoy teaching people about Nature's bounty in the desert and how to be a steward of the environment while enjoying the fruits of her labour. It has always been a challenge to be taken seriously as a woman-owned business, but years of taking on that challenge, receiving support from people in the industry as well as customers has brought us to the success we enjoy today 31 years and still going. I am truly proud of everything we have achieved so far and am honoured to run the only company in the world that uses all parts of the prickly pear cactus fruit for

the benefit of the company, non-profit organisations and the environment. The ingredients that are used in the products are pure, unadulterated and simple, which ensures a clean, delicious and nutritious end product."

As the company has grown and gained greater acclaim the challenges for Cheri's is keeping up with the demand for its products. As such looking to the future Cheri is keen to remain focused on growth, as she proudly concludes.

"Here at Cheri's Desert Harvest demand has grown steadily over recent years, and as such we need to improve our automation capabilities and to enlarge the current facility to maintain the room for additional machinery and personnel.

"Therefore, my ongoing goal is to continue to create new products, to expand our businesses into new countries, to educate consumers about being environmentally conscious and to encourage and foster new ideas from women striving to start a business. We will achieve these goals by aligning our businesses with strong, supportive leadership from businesses with the same foresight, direction and integrity."

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