



STEP – Agri-Value

**Taste of Canada 2018
October 29-30, 2018
Chicago, IL**

TRIP REPORT



Overview/Mission Description

STEP in collaboration with the provinces of BC, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Global Affairs Canada developed a program coined “Taste of Canada Showcase” for Canadian exporters targeting the food service and retail sector in the US Midwest Region.

Taste of Canada Showcase is an annual professional food showcase event designed as a mini Canada-only program for qualified export ready and capable Canadian suppliers to present food and beverage products to pre-screened US importers, buyers and distributors from the retail and foodservice industries. This intimate forum provides buyers and suppliers the time to meet, discuss suppliers’ capabilities, review buyers’ needs and negotiate possible synergies.

It provided STEP Members the Opportunity to:

- Showcase their products at a full-day tabletop exposition.
- Attend pre-scheduled B2B meetings with buyers from the retail and foodservice industries located in the US Midwest Region.
- Collect market intelligence through store tours.

Summarized Agenda

The event ran over a two-day period. Day one consisted of set-up for the table top display and retail store tours. The tours gave participants a chance to see firsthand what kind of products they would have to compete with in order to get into the market. It also provided an opportunity to see the different categories of stores from low-priced discount to high end specialty.

Day two was the table-top exposition and the pre-scheduled buyer meetings. Each participant had a minimum of five scheduled meetings with relevant buyers. The meetings provided an opportunity to make an initial introduction and explore the possibility of a business relationship. In between meetings buyers had the chance to check out participants’ table top displays and sample product.

Market Information

The City of Chicago is the third-most populous city in the United States. With over 2.7 million residents, it is also the most populous city in both the state of Illinois and the Midwestern United States. The Chicago metropolitan area, often referred to as Chicagoland, has nearly 10 million people and is the third-largest in the U.S. Positioned along Lake Michigan, the city

is an international hub for finance, commerce, industry, technology, telecommunications, and transportation.

The state of Illinois is the 5th most populous state in the US with population of over 12.8 million. Illinois is a leader in food manufacturing and meat processing. In terms of revenue generated, Illinois' top five agricultural products are corn for grain, soybeans, hogs, cattle and calves, and dairy products. The Chicago area is a global center for food manufacturing and meat processing, with many plants, processing houses, and distribution facilities.

The grocery and foodservice sectors in the state of Illinois offers a dynamic and growing market for Canadian agri-food exporters and provide an excellent entry point into the American market. This region has a strong agricultural trade relationship with Canada and is geographically well-situated for further trade growth.

The region is home to retail giants such as Aldi and Save-A-Lot, larger regional chains such as Jewel-Osco (division of Albertson's), Mariano's (division of Kroger), Schnuck Markets and Fresh Thyme Farmers Market, as well as smaller chains which could provide a good entry point, including Festival Foods, Woodman's, Treasure Island Food Market, and Dill Pickle Food Co-op. Several national retailers also have regional buying offices in Chicago, including Whole Foods and Costco.

Chicago is also a regional hub and distribution centre for foodservice distributors and is a good entry point for Canadian companies wishing to access US Midwest market. The top foodservice distributors in the US with headquarters in the region include US Foods, Gordon Food Service, Reinhart Foodservice, Kehe Foods and European Imports (part of Sysco). The region is also home to the largest redistributor in the country, DOT Foods.

Chicago is well known for its robust culinary scene that attracts guests from around the globe. The foodservice market in Illinois and in Chicagoland in particular, is large and diverse, and holds many opportunities for Canadian companies offering unique products at competitive prices.

Canada's agri-food exports to Illinois in 2016 were valued at \$2.22 billion with top exports including cereal preparations (\$532 million), foods and food material (\$398 million), sugar and sugar preparations (\$207 million), refined canola/mustard oil (\$155 million), pork (\$110 million), beef (\$93 million) etc.

Results

Quantitative Results

Trade Leads: 48

Deals: 15

of Companies Participating: 6

50 companies from 7 provinces participated in the event, including 6 from Saskatchewan. These companies had the opportunity to meet with 30 buyers from the Midwest Region. Each participant had a minimum of 5 pre-set meetings as well as the opportunity to meet with buyers as they walked the room.

The first day of the program provided a lot of useful market research. Touring stores is an easy way to get a feel for the local market. By finding the area in each store where their product would fit a company can learn a lot. Seeing a variety of stores also helps a company to decide where their product would be the best fit.

The second day consisted of the B2Bs and the table top display. The setup of the room worked well as both the meetings and the table tops were in the same room. This allowed for participants to meet with buyers but keep an eye on their table top. Compared to a standard trade show this format is a lot more efficient.

Recommendations

Overall this mission was a success for the STEP Members that participated. Each company met a handful of buyers and follow up is already underway. Initial feedback was positive with each company anticipating sales to come from the event. The buyer numbers were about the same as previous years. As always more buyers would make for an even stronger event. Many of the buyers ended up being brokers and distributors. These are ok to meet with as long as there is a sufficient number of retail buyers in attendance as well. Many companies that participated already had a distributor and broker.

The format was almost perfect this year, with webinars scheduled ahead of time it eliminated the need for a formal educational program. Keeping the stores tours and making them optional was the right move. Many companies still participated and feedback was positive. Having the table tops and meetings all in one large room works the best. A small reception at the end of the event might encourage buyers to hang around longer and might be worth considering.

The format of this event works very well. It is a great platform for any company wanting to take an inexpensive look at the US market. Some minor tweaks are needed to continue to improve the format but overall it hits the mark. The focused nature of the event makes for a much more efficient use of a company's time when compared to exhibiting at a standard trade show.

I recommend that STEP continues to recruit members to attend this yearly event. The location for next year's Taste of Canada is still being determined. Possible locations for next year include: Texas, Florida, California and Atlanta.

STEP Contact for Further Information

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Pictures





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