Secondary Processing of Seal Skins

Introduction

Seal pelt production in Newfoundland traditionally involved production of semi-processed seal skins. Processing involves removing fat from the pelts, grading and curing. There is, however, opportunity to add value to the pelt through a secondary process known as shaving. The process involves shaving a portion of the seal skin, using specialized machinery, in order to remove a thin portion of the leather side. Skin is trimmed off, resulting in a thinner, more pliable skin. Carino Limited, one of Newfoundland’s largest seal pelt producers, recognized an opportunity in shaving that would create extra market value and additional processing jobs.

In 2000, Carino Limited, with funding from the Fisheries Diversification Program, started a pilot project for value-added, seal-skin processing. This involved the purchase of a pelt shaving machine, retention of qualified trainers and modifications to their existing site in South Dildo.

Background

Carino Company Limited has operated a seal-processing facility in South Dildo, Trinity Bay since 1957. Employing in excess of 90 people during peak production, Carino is one of the main buyers of seals in the province, marketing its seal pelts mainly through its parent company, Rieber Skinn A/S, Bergen, Norway. Rieber has been finishing and marketing seal skins around the world for 120 years. The growing demand for seal skins in the fur and leather industry is extremely encouraging. Customers have become more educated with respect to the humaneness, professionalization of the harvest, and the effective resource management of the harp seal population.
Methodology

Carino Limited purchased a new seal pelt shaving machine that involved the training of six people to operate the new technology. A portion of seal pelts were set aside for training and machine testing. A master shaver, employed by Rieber Skinn A/S Company, traveled from Norway to South Dildo to provide additional training.

Results

Eleven new jobs were created as a result of additional, value-added processing. A second training period for employees was also successfully completed. The finished value of seal pelt was increased by 20 to 30%, and the operating season was extended by five weeks.

Conclusion

This pilot project, dedicated to adding value to Carino Limited seal pelts in South Dildo, has been successful. Carino now benefits from continued demand for value-added pelts and plans to make further improvements to their production lines. The company focuses on maximizing sales to fur markets and uses leather markets for a portion of their production. Secondary processing of seal skins in Newfoundland and Labrador will continue to grow and develop in order to ensure maximum economic benefits from the sealing industry. The results of this project provide clear evidence as to the benefits of value-added processing.

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The $10 million Fisheries Diversification Program is part of the $81.5 million Canada-Newfoundland Agreement Respecting the Economic Development Component of the Canadian Fisheries Adjustment and Restructuring Initiative.