

Bean North Coffee Roasting Company

Whitehorse (rural)

Started: 1997

Contact: Jennifer Groot

Bean North is a coffee business that roasts and sells “Fair Trade” coffee. All of Bean North’s coffee is organic, though not all of it is certified. Bean North is owned by four people, two of whom work for the company (one full-time, one part-time). They retail and wholesale their coffee primarily in the Yukon but about 15% of the sales are to customers in western Canada, the U.S. and even Scotland

Getting started: Four friends who wanted to start a business researched selling coffee as one option. The business has been financed by the owners as the banks were not interested in financing the operation. They prepared a business plan to provide focus. One owner went outside for coffee roasting training and they also brought someone here for a week long session.

Key to success: In order to be competitive with other coffee suppliers, Bean North has kept its overhead low by locating outside of the city. Local advertising, pamphlets, a web site and one-on-one education

on Fair Trade has helped raise awareness of the product. Home delivery of the coffee has also been rewarding and provides important feedback from customers.

Lessons learned: Having a specialty product has ensured Bean North a niche in the market. Getting the business going has been a lot of hard and stressful work but it is becoming more fun. It may have been less stressful if more time had been spent on training and planning before start-up (e.g. marketing, accounting and coffee roasting). Visiting Fair Trade coffee producers in Mexico has increased the commitment to the business.

Future of business: Bean North owners expect the business to continue its steady growth mostly by expanding its market in Canada and are developing new packaging to improve their marketing. Bean North hopes to eventually offer a whole variety of Fair Trade products and will start by selling tea and hot chocolate.

