Media Release

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Partnership puts Indigenous Food Industry on Growth Path

The partnership between one of Australia's largest food manufacturers and the country's leading indigenous food company is set to double the size of the fledgling bush foods industry and create jobs for Aboriginal Australians.

Ward McKenzie, one of Australia's largest food manufacturers and exporters of herbs and spices, and Robins Foods, makers of Australia's leading indigenous food range Outback Spirit, have joined forces to market the unique flavours of Australia's native foods to the world.

The companies predicted the native foods industry, currently worth an estimated $10 million per annum, will double its turnover over the next five years as a direct result of their collaboration.

“We are very excited about bringing Aboriginal foods not just to a wider market at home but to the rest of the world,” said Helen Ward, Joint Managing Director of Ward McKenzie.

“We want to help Robins Foods create sustainable jobs for Aboriginal people through their partner Indigenous Australian Foods (IAF), an indigenous-owned supply chain.”

Ward McKenzie's investment will strengthen the entire native foods value chain, said Juleigh Robins, Managing Director of Robins Foods.

“We are thrilled to have a company of the caliber of Ward McKenzie help us develop these new and delicious products. The partnership puts our aim of making native foods an everyday part of Australia's diet within close reach.”

Ms Robins said the support her company has received from the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) has strengthened the bush foods industry and facilitated its growth.

“The Desert Knowledge CRC's support is critical for improving the efficiencies and capacities of indigenous people who harvest native foods from the desert and for introducing sustainable agricultural systems for these species.”
Dr Craig James, Desert Knowledge CRC Program Manager, expects the partnership to increase the production capacity of desert Australia, home of the two bush foods currently driving the industry’s growth.

“Bush tomatoes and wattle seeds from desert Australia are the biggest value creators in the native foods industry today”, he said. “This business collaboration is good news for the indigenous people who harvest them.”

“The Desert Knowledge CRC’s research projects on native foods work at different points along the entire value chain to meet the rapidly increasing demand for traditional Aboriginal foods by helping to secure year-round quality supplies.”

Robins Foods introduced Australian indigenous foods to the domestic and international food industry in 1986 by establishing native foods supply networks around Australia, particularly in remote indigenous communities.

The company promoted Aboriginal equity in the native food industry by developing non-profit procurement company IAF. It handed ownership over to IAF’s Aboriginal members in 2002.

IAF aims to create sustainable businesses and jobs for Aboriginal people through involvement in the Robins/IAF value chain.

“The Ward McKenzie/Robins partnership will inject new skills, resources and market potential into existing relationships. It allows us to consolidate commercial partnerships in the supply area and value add at various stages of bush food processing,” said John Collyer, Chairperson of IAF.

Ms Robins said all Australians can now enjoy the unique flavours of bush tomatoes, wattle seeds, kakadu plums, lemon myrtle, native mint, wild lime, mountain pepper and many more products in the delicious Outback Spirit range, which is sold in 500 Coles Supermarkets.

“Thanks to the Coles Indigenous Food Fund a proportion of these sales helps to develop indigenous food production in remote Aboriginal communities.”

“The sauces, dressings, condiments and herbs of our Outback Spirit range offer consumers real Australian food – a delectable fusion of age-old Aboriginal staples with the techniques and foods of Australia’s settler and immigrant heritage that is simple to use and simply tastes great. ”

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