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## **Maine MEP Helps Limestone Flour Company Succeed**

LIMESTONE – When Paul ‘Chris’ Durepo decided to expand his fledgling Maine Street Flour Co. he turned to the Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Maine MEP) for help.

“Truthfully, I couldn’t have done what I’ve done without the help of the people at the Maine MEP and the Northern Maine Development Commission,” Durepo said. “The people at MEP and NMDC have done all they could to help me succeed. I called on them every time I needed help, and they’ve come through for me every time.”

A three-year old company, Maine Street Flour Co. currently produces three specialty products: a whole-wheat flour, a ‘just add water’ pancake mix and a potato flour.

A tenant of the Loring Applied Technology Center, Durepo produces his stone-ground products for commercial and retail customers right at the incubator site. “Thanks to the help I’ve gotten from the MEP and NMDC, I’ve just signed an agreement with Associated Grocers to have that company distribute my product in their stores,” Durepo said. “And that’s just the beginning.”

“We are always delighted to hear a success story such as this,” said Rod Rodrigue, president of the Maine MEP. “Maine Street Flour Co. had specific problems that needed to be addressed quickly and efficiently.

“Brian Sutherland, one of our field agents in Aroostook County, worked closely with Chris Durepo during the past few months in an effort to address the company’s needs and help his business grow.”

“While the Maine Street Flour Co. made some inroads during the past year, one of its remaining obstacles was to design and purchase packaging for its new products in order to compete with its rivals,” said Sutherland.

“The vendors we needed to help are located outside Maine and we knew the research would be time-consuming and expensive,” Durepo said. “Believe me, with a company of

only three or four people, there's not a lot of time for any of us to do research. Besides, it would have taken valuable financial resources away from the company.”

Sutherland not only found a design company to fit Maine Street's needs, he also helped Durepo apply for a Rural Development Grant that was used to design and purchase new bags for his product. “That grant allowed me to free up company funds for other needed manufacturing equipment,” Durepo said.

Because of the Maine MEP's help, Durepo said Maine Street Flour Co. was able to meet its product marketing deadlines at various local retail stores. “Customer satisfaction has been very high and the number of stores that will sell our products is expected to double within the next six months,” Durepo said.

While the company's new packaging has already had a major impact in Aroostook County, Durepo knows it's only the beginning. “In addition to signing an agreement with Associated Grocers, we are also negotiating with other major supermarket chains in Maine,” he said.

“Chris is only 24 and his company is also young,” said Sutherland, “but he's got a great chance to succeed. His products are excellent, he's got a solid business plan and he's always willing to listen and accept advice when it's offered.

“It is always rewarding working with someone who has such enthusiasm,” Sutherland added, “and who is willing to listen to what others have to say. I look forward to working with him again in the future.”

“There's no doubt I'll be calling on the MEP and NMDC again,” Durepo said. “I would certainly recommend both organizations to any manufacturer looking for professional help, whatever the situation.”

The Maine MEP is an affiliate of the NIST under the U.S. Department of Commerce. The national MEP is a network of manufacturing extension centers that provide business and technical assistance to smaller manufacturers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Through MEP, manufacturers have access to more than 2000 manufacturing and business “coaches” whose job is to help firms make changes that lead to greater productivity, increased profits, and enhanced global competitiveness. For more information on the Maine MEP program call 1-800-637-4634.