

## **Maine MEP TRAINS AFGHAN BUSINESSWOMEN**

*Entrepreneurs visit US as part of Bpeace effort to boost economic development in their country*

Augusta - As part of an ongoing international initiative to bring more jobs to the people of Afghanistan, coaches from the Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Maine MEP) have provided training to Afghan businesswomen specializing in food processing.

“We demonstrated for our guests’ ways to improve efficiency using LEAN manufacturing techniques by identifying wastes and streamlining their processes.” said Rosemary Presnar of Maine MEP. “They told us afterwards they really appreciated the hands on lesson and could see how the concepts could be applied to the businesses they’ve created and grown in Afghanistan.”

The women were among a group of 12 Afghan entrepreneurs who visited more than 40 host companies in their industry sectors this past October. The women spent three weeks in the U.S. as part of the Bpeace Apprentice Road Trip (BART). Partially funded by the U.S. Department of State, BART is a three-year business development program helping these Afghan woman entrepreneurs and fostering economic development for the region.

Bpeace’s three- year investment strategy includes a customized mix of consulting, training, mentoring, out-of-country apprenticeships and business site visits, employee technical training, equipment, technology, branding and marketing, networking opportunities and access to capital and markets. The Maine MEP and participating Maine businesses provided training and site visits to strengthen the operational expertise of the Afghan entrepreneurs.

Cynthia Fisher of Look’s Gourmet Foods and Bpeace volunteer coordinated the Maine BART program. Among the Maine specialty food businesses that hosted BART participants include Gladstone’s Under the Sun (Maine Munchies), Grandy Oats, Pemberton’s Gourmet Foods, Stonewall Kitchen, Swan’s Honey, Look’s Gourmet Food Company, Simply Divine Brownies and Wilbur’s of Maine Chocolate Confections.

### **About Maine MEP**

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 or visit [www.mainemep.org](http://www.mainemep.org).

### **About Bpeace**

Bpeace is a non-profit international volunteer network of business professionals that helps women entrepreneurs in post-conflict countries expand their businesses, create employment, and build a peaceful future for their communities. They believe: More jobs mean less violence. For more information on Bpeace (Business Council for Peace) visit [www.bpeace.org](http://www.bpeace.org).