

Local Growth: Zumbro River Brand

Growing company cultivating quality and innovation



INTRO

Zumbro River Brand (ZRB) is a contract food manufacturer – producing food ingredients and finished products to customer specifications. The company formed in 1985 and purchased a facility in Owatonna, MN. In 2002, ZRB acquired a Wenger twin screw extruder and began to make high protein snacks and cereals. Since that time, ZRB has continued to develop and produce high protein and specialty extruded snacks, cereals, and crisps.

In 2006, with the help of Albert Lea Economic Development Agency (ALEDA), ZRB purchased a second facility in Albert Lea to expand contract extrusion capabilities and offer custom agglomeration. Since then the company has expanded three times with their latest expansion to be completed in 2017. ZRB develops and supplies nutrition bar manufacturers with patented, trademarked Z-Crisps® - high protein crisps that provide delicious crunch to nutrition bars. The company also focuses on extrusion of high protein

cereals and snacks and agglomerates/instantizes a wide variety of powders including specialty dairy proteins and beverage mixes like cappuccinos and flavored instant teas.

ZRB emphasizes producing quality products, valuing employees, and encouraging innovation. The company encourages their 160 employees to share ideas and find ways to solve problems; they refer to this as their “start-up culture.” ZRB is well known for their ability to work with contract customers in development of new products and they are committed to manufacturing customers’ products to the highest quality standard.

CHOOSING ALBERT LEA

The story of ZRB bringing operations to Albert Lea and growing here is one of collaboration and problem solving. In 2006, ZRB was ready to expand its current operations but did not have the space to expand at their Owatonna location. ZRB began looking at expanding to a second community when the opportunity to purchase a large pharmaceutical grade plant became available in Albert Lea. President of ZRB, Pam Sander, said they recognized the opportunity in Albert Lea and were impressed with Albert Lea’s responsiveness to their inquiries,

“When we found the location, we contacted ALEDA to find out more about it and learned that they had already negotiated an excellent offer for the building that they were willing to transfer to ZRB so ZRB would be they buyer. This was the beginning of a great relationship.”

ZRB added onto the Albert Lea plant in 2007 to create a warehousing and staging area of 10,000 square feet. By 2011, they had outgrown their warehousing area and began looking for another solution. ALEDA had space available in their 62,500-square foot industrial spec building in the South Industrial Park and offered to lease to ZRB.

“What was great about that project, was that we didn’t need the entire warehouse, and ALEDA allowed us to rent one-third of the space. We eventually outgrew one-third, and took up two-thirds and now lease the entire building,” said Sander.

In 2014, ZRB expanded again and added an extruder and two agglomerators to meet the increasing needs of their customers. The original 10,000 square foot warehouse became the staging area and product was moved from the plant to the ALEDA warehouse to be shipped to their customers.

In 2016, steady growth of sales had strained capacity and ZRB began to plan for another expansion.

“We wanted to add an additional extruder, and have room for another, in our building. Not having a warehouse at our location, our staging area had to be inside the plant. But, if we had warehousing space available onsite, we could use the current staging area for a new

extruder and also have space for a future extruder to be added down the road,” said Sander.

Having had such excellent experience working with ALEDA, Sander knew to whom ZRB could turn for help on this big project.

“When Pam approached me with this project, I knew this was one we needed to take on and move quickly. ZRB has been a great community partner since moving operations here and knowing this project would add additional jobs to our community, it was the right time to invest,” explains Ryan Nolander, Executive Director of ALEDA.

Over several months, a short time for a project of this size, Ryan and Pam worked together with other community partners to get the project pulled together. This new project included ZRB transferring land behind their building to ALEDA to construct a 74,000 square foot food-grade warehouse. ZRB will lease the warehouse from ALEDA and will now have their staging and warehousing adjacent to the plant. This will eliminate the need to lease the ALEDA warehouse in the ALEDA Industrial Park, freeing up that space for a new company. The additional equipment will allow ZRB to create 20+ new jobs, a big win for the community.

When asked about the impact of this project, Pam stated,

“It is tremendously important for ZRB’s ability to grow. Being able to lease this food grade warehouse, adjacent to our plant, significantly increases our efficiency compared to our current warehouse in the ALEDA Industrial Park which is across town from our plant. Moreover, it frees up space in our current facility so we can add another extrusion system in 2017. The new system will increase our extrusion capacity by 50%. We will also have space to add a 4th extrusion system in 2018 or 2019. The addition of each new extrusion system creates 20 new jobs, brings many new customers to visit the plant and generates significant business in Albert Lea for restaurants motels, supplies, services, and other purchases.”

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

ZRB’s growth and success in Albert Lea is a testament to the viability of our community. Albert Lea’s location along two major interstates is an attractive feature as well as the town’s natural beauty, quality of life, and access to large cities such as Rochester and Mankato, according to Sander.

“Albert Lea is a beautiful place to live, and initiatives such as the City’s Blue Zones Certification makes it an attractive and healthy small town for our employees to live in,” said Sander

ZRB strives to use local services such as electricians, construction etc. and notes that the quality restaurants and hotels are a big asset when it comes to attracting new customers.

“Our customers come here to discuss projects, run trials, and see their products’ production and it is valuable to have nice places for them to stay, eat, and enjoy entertainment while they are in town,” explained Sander.

Not only is the community a great place to live and do business, but supportive as well,

“There is an excellent community spirit here in Albert Lea. The Chamber of Commerce, ALEDA, and others have provided critical help for us on multiple occasions. Their dedication to the business community is outstanding,” said Sander.

With the help of ALEDA and community partners, Zumbro River Brand has found a home in Albert Lea, and plans to continue to grow here.