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Steve Colyer
Program Director
Minority Export Training Program
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Dear Steve,

It is with gratitude and enthusiasm that I send you this heartfelt letter of thanks. Your Minority Export Training Program has not only given us a priceless education in exporting, but it has given our small business new life and new direction.

Before participating in the Minority Export Training program, we were faced with increasing competition from large, national businesses. As an independent distributor, we were finding it more and more difficult to compete locally. We were losing some key, high-volume accounts to national competitors with deep pockets, low bids and the cash to make large capital investments. We needed to find a way to recover lost revenues and build our business. We looked to exporting as way to do that.

We didn't know anything about exporting when we began the program. But that quickly changed. Each and every class we attended not only gave us valuable information and step-by-step tools to export our products, but we met the right people who could help us when we had a customer in front of us.

For example, our plan was to focus first on exporting to our backyard, The Caribbean. SUSTA's Gems program gave us valuable information about import volumes from specific Caribbean countries. So we decided which countries to target first. Then with the help of Omar Gonzalez and CBATO we were able to find the right customers on those island nations. We started discussions with a foodservice company in Trinidad and Tobago. They liked our products and wanted to order. But our customer needed a Certificate of Origin and Free Sale to import our drink mixes. I was able to pick up the phone and call Liz Gablehouse at the Department of Agriculture and she told me exactly what I needed to do. The Certificate was rushed the next day.

The MET taught us about getting paid and the risks involved, more importantly though, we learned that WE control the deal, not our customer. So with this in mind, we respectfully request payment up front via wire transfer and we get it! Plus, the MAP branded program has given us more financial freedom to reach and serve the customers we want to target. The MET program has given us the knowledge, tools and most importantly the **confidence** to do business with customers overseas.

Since we started the program we are still exporting to the Bahamas, but we are also exporting to Trinidad & Tobago, Antigua, Dubai and Colombia. We are excited about an up coming reverse trade mission with the Caribbean. We want to find a distributor in Barbados. Plus, with the help of MAP branded we are exhibiting at the Americas Food and Beverage show in October. We have also been contacted by a beverage importer in Thailand who says they got our name from the Office of Agricultural Affairs at the US Embassy in Thailand. So I did some research and read a GAIN report on beverage imports in Thailand to see if this would be a good market to sell to. I wouldn't have known how to do this if we weren't involved in the MET program.

Steve, I could go on and on as you know. This program has literally opened up the world to us. This time last year we could never have imagined we would be where we are today. We are growing our business one new customer at a time. We are moving in the right direction, and we have big plans for the future.

Bruce and I cannot thank you enough for involving us in the MET program. We hope, after the program concludes, that we may continue to stay in touch.

Best regards and thank you for everything!

Courtenay Carr Russo
Tropical Delight Daiquiris, Inc.