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Being owned by women helps businesses win deals

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Margaret Hughes, left, and Betty Wood

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How important is it to make sure people know that your business is owned and managed by women?

If you ask Margaret Hughes who owns Best Cooking Pulses with her two sisters, she will tell you it can be very important.

Female-owned businesses

How can local female-owned businesses get certified? The Women's Enterprise Centre is trained to conduct the certification procedure, which includes a site visit and requires a \$750 fee.

What kind of female-owned businesses have been certified in Canada? About 25 per cent are manufacturers, 37 per cent are in business services and 10 per cent are distributors.

Are female-owned businesses proportionately represented in the supply chain? No. Less than five per cent of all government and large corporation contracts are with female-owned firms. But about 37 per cent of all growth-oriented small and medium-sized businesses in Canada are female-owned and 63 per cent are owned by men. About 30 per cent of all SMEs in Canada are owned by women.

-- Source: WEConnect

The Portage la Prairie company, one of the largest pea fibre companies in the world, recently won two contracts in the United States with much larger companies. Those wins were aided by its recent certification as a female-owned business from a new organization called WEConnect Canada.

Betty Wood, head of WEConnect, the year-old Canadian non-profit modelled after U.S. and U.K. predecessors, was in Winnipeg on Tuesday on a recruiting drive for growth-oriented, female-owned businesses.

Wood said getting certified is a way to leverage access for women's businesses into the supply chains of large corporations that seek to increase the diversity of their supplier network.

Surprisingly enough, WEConnect is the only way to formally certify that a business is majority owned, managed and controlled by women.

Best Cooking Pulses Inc. supplies to ingredient companies and pet food manufacturers throughout North America.

It has been in Hughes' family for three generations, but the significance of the fact that the current generation are women only hit home last year when a U.S. pet food company owned by Colgate-Palmolive approached it to become a supplier.

"When they learned that it was owned by women they became excited," Hughes said.

That's because doing business with a female-owned business can burnish a company's standing as a good corporate citizen and add to its diversity supplier percentage, something that can help gain access to U.S. government procurement programs.

But the pet food company needed Best Cooking Pulses to be certified as a female-owned business. That prompted Hughes to contact WEConnect Canada and become the first Manitoba

company to be certified by the organization.

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