

THE REALLY GOOD BUFFALO PROJECT: A 'VALUES ADDED' PRODUCT

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Case Objectives and Use

This field researched case was developed to introduce students to culturally sensitive research methods and business practices. The case illustrates the development of branding that includes culturally appropriate components and demonstrates the challenges of interpreting research results and reports so that they can be used in a meaningful way to assist in decision-making

This case would be appropriate for undergraduate students in courses as diverse as global food systems, Native American studies, marketing research, strategic management, agricultural marketing, and animal science.

Case Synopsis

For several years, an effort to 'bring back the buffalo' has been of key interest in many American Indian communities across the country, and particularly in the Northern Plains of the United States. Tribal college faculty approached colleagues at South Dakota State University during a meeting of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) with the desire to develop a niche market for Native American-raised bison. The Lakota words for the concept underlying the effort are Tatanka Waste (pronounced Ta-TONK-a Wash-TAY), roughly translated as 'Really Good Buffalo'.

A pivotal factor that influenced the development of the Really Good Buffalo project was the unique historical, cultural, and spiritual relationship between American Indians and bison. These issues and the diverse consortium of partners involved made it critically important that the project deliberately address values as part of the niche market analysis. As one tribal partner stated, "Great care must be taken when we are working with our brothers, the buffalo."

This case emphasizes the process of concept-testing, pre-feasibility analysis, and branding of an agriculturally based niche product within a broader cultural context.

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