

Båtsfjord – a society of good practice

Norway



The fishing community of Båtsfjord has formed a co-operative society where all the businesses (and the local authority) have joined forces to secure the village's economic development and prosperity. The community faces enormous challenges as export markets are far away and rural depopulation has created a manpower problem.

A supportive structure

The village of Båtsfjord makes a significant contribution to Norway's fishing industry. Although all the businesses that operate from here are in competition, they acknowledge that they all need to pull together for the greater good. Joint services have been set up: an occupational health service, a refrigeration plant (a vital asset as no single business could afford to set up this kind of operation), a training centre and Fishnet, a facility for looking at IT opportunities.

Båtsfjordbruket AS

Båtsfjordbruket AS is an SME within the fishing industry network. Established in the late 19th century, it was modernised extensively in 1981, with a further 15 million NOK (about 1,8 million) invested during the 90s to keep the business at the cutting edge. This investment paid off and the company has enjoyed tremendous prosperity in recent years.

Aims and objectives

Båtsfjordbruket AS aims to:

- n Develop and maintain a safe and health promoting workplace, a good working environment and to take environmental considerations on board
- n Achieve prosperity with high quality production processes and a top class product
- n Be flexible and adaptable to ensure future prosperity.

The business is up-to-date with all statutory requirements within production and process management and will continue to make improvements in the future.

The demands of the job

Each year the enterprise buys about 5 million kilos of raw materials. The fish is then filleted and 90 per cent of it exported to European and US markets.

Almost 50 per cent of the staff work on filleting. This is skilled work and demanding in terms of the speed required to keep up with production, but it is also monotonous, repetitive work that

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carries with it the risk of muscular-skeletal problems. Over the last five years, a great deal of money has been invested in improving working conditions, efficiency and hygiene.

Occupational Health and Safety and Workplace Health Promotion

The enterprise has fulfilled statutory requirements regarding occupational health and safety. It works with Båtsfjord OHS to fulfill legal requirements and to assess the working environment so that further improvements can be made. In recent years, about 3 million NOK (about 366,000) has been invested in welfare measures aimed at improving the work environment for staff – these include a canteen, sauna and kitchen facilities.

Employee participation

The employees are a very important resource to the company. As depopulation has resulted in a shortage of staff, offering good working conditions is vital for attracting and retaining employees. Employees can make a contribution to their working life via the Work Environment Committee, special working groups that are set up to manage important issues that crop up and meetings organised to discuss problems and make plans for the future.

Developing skills

The company is happy to see workers enhance their skills and encourages employees to go on courses. Many further education programmes are organised in conjunction with the Båtsfjord Educational Centre.

Cultural connections

To meet the company's employment needs, staff from a number of foreign countries have been taken on - workers come from other Scandinavian countries like Sweden and Finland as well as from Russia and Indonesia. Båtsfjordbruket AS makes a point of helping foreign workers feel at home, trouble is taken to ensure that this sense of belonging extends beyond work and into the local community as well. The company has made a conscious effort to ensure that foreign workers are integrated into the workforce and to develop a team spirit that flourishes despite differences in background and culture. Great efforts have been made to encourage everyone to take part in the various activities organised by the workplace for its staff: sporting events for example, Christmas parties, and the annual celebration when the sun returns in March, after 3 months of winter darkness.

The company also offers training courses and summer jobs to local schoolchildren in an effort to

encourage them to stay in Båtsfjord rather than leaving to seek work elsewhere as soon as they have finished their schooling.

Results

The fishing industry network is securing and maintaining a stable industry in a region where several businesses have failed because of the problems caused by distant markets and a lack of skilled workers.

All the organisations involved in the network benefit from it e.g. from the joint enterprises mentioned earlier and also from training provision for workers. This support structure helps all the businesses retain a place in the global market. The University of Tromsø has become involved too and has provided highly-qualified staff to help with the development of educational training in these businesses.

Båtsfjordbruket AS is a fine example of how an SME can use this kind of network not only to secure and maintain its own production and economic prosperity, but to create a happy and health promoting work environment where employees can participate in developing plans and strategies for the future.