

“Buffalo Return” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hv58a1u2WWg>

In 1889, the Oglala Lakota were moved to Pine Ridge Reservation (125 x 75 square miles, 2nd largest reservation in the US. The Nation retained 2,2 M acres and the US government took 5.5 million of the Nation’s acres. 28.6% of lands were retained, 71.4% were stolen.) **All** the buffalo were killed to make way for “settlement expansion”. The government provided the Oglala people a system of rations—tribal members lined up for their “daily ration.” Mark Tilsen, “Reservations were not designed to have a functioning economy. They were designed to support the non-Indian economies that surrounded it. Oglala Lakota were put on Pine Ridge, the center of the US, the most isolated place in the US. Everything was taken away: their way of life, their culture, language, spirituality, their sister Nation—the Buffalo, the basis of their economy.”

Karlene Hunter, “The Oglala Sioux people need to take our destiny into our own hands, because we see what 100 years of dependency has done: 75% unemployment rate, people living on \$50 - \$100/year. You have families living with 3-4 generations in one household because there’s no housing. We have to change this.”

One day in 2006 at the Chamber of Commerce meeting, there was a call from a member looking for more sales for their Buffalo meat. Karlene Hunter and Mark Tilsen looked at their traditional foods and thought “what about *‘wasna’*, a traditional food of buffalo meat and berries? Our hunters and warriors carried “wasna” in a buffalo horn for sustenance. What if *‘wasna’* was made into an energy snack bar? Both agreed that the idea behind the Tanka Bar is to build a business that is the economy of the community, the health of the land, and the health of the buffalo. They spent about a year developing a product, designed a package and thought about the annual Black Hills Pow-Wow with 10,000 people. They met that moment with no sales just passing out **Tanka Bars** at the Black Hills Pow-Wow. The people got excited--Buffalo and Cranberry energy bars! The media picked it up. The response was HUGE! NANF’s website crashed with 4,000 simultaneous hits. In 2007, Karlene and Mark took out a \$1 M loan. We sold and sold! Then in August of 2008, everything stopped. It was a “cliff moment” to stop or step off the cliff. Mark thought, “If we don’t go for it, what’s going to change? Nothing!” Our young people started putting together **Tanka Bar** on-line product offerings through social networking on the internet. For two years, we got on-line orders in and fulfilled on the orders by mail. REI and Whole Foods—bought from a national brand in the middle of a USDA food desert.

Mark Tilsen, “What is poverty? It is the perception that you don’t have any options—that all your options have been taken away and that your choices are limited to living in a welfare state. The poverty situations on the res are inhumane—not acceptable. We are short \$5,000 houses, we have the shortest life expectancy in America—none of that is acceptable. So let’s attack those problems—the community is doing that. We have to make this change together.” We need to create a private sector, beginning with NANF. NANF grew lasting alliances with Chris Oliviero of Niman Ranch and Bob Dieen of Rocky Mountain Natural Meats. Each entrepreneurial undertaking drives an opportunity for development. We’re saying the opportunity for development already exists as half of our current workforce could rent, own, lease, buy capacity as they have jobs. As a community, we need to meet them. A strawbale housing solution to a market that already exists. Building homes—employees of NANF want to participate because they have jobs. People taking control of their own lives. Not looking for someone to save us. Not waiting for someone to fix our problems for us.

NANF created 18 jobs, and a profitable path to ownership for all our employees so that this business will be there forever and thrive within the community so that it never ends up in the hands of an external investor, who might decide that the enterprise should be moved somewhere else. We’re going to break \$2M in sales this year. We need to get up to \$20M + so that we are an economic force, that we are a part of the Oglala people. Yes, we just got started! The people believe that the buffalo have returned to heal the people. We are dependent on each other. People restored the buffalo, so buffalo will help restore the people. Sounds like a romantic theory. But it is real economics.”

"I welcome our investors who have the courage and innovation to break the economic isolation of the reservation and move with us into a new economic future," said Dawn Sherman, CEO of NANF. "We celebrate the vision that will return the bison to the lands, lives and economies of Native communities." Strategically investing in businesses in communities of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) is part of the financial activism currently being advocated nationwide. The Candide Group led NANF's capital raise on behalf of the Libra Social Investment Fund. "We saw in NANF a business that has all the ingredients needed to be successful: superior products with a loyal customer base, and a community of employees, suppliers and partners for whom failure is simply not an option," said Aner Ben-Ami, Founding Partner of the Candide Group. "We were excited to partner with the NANF team, and structure an investment that will help the company realize its potential while supporting its mission of creating wealth and ownership for Native communities and ranchers and building a Native-led brand committed to traditional values and regenerative agriculture."



Native American Natural Foods Announces Multi-Million Dollar Capital Investment

New Partnership to Support the Growth of TANKA and Bring Bison Back to the Lands, Lives and Economy of Native American People

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(Photo: Business Wire) Author: Denise Shoukas



PINE RIDGE, S.D.--([BUSINESS WIRE](#))--Native American Natural Foods (“NANF”), an innovative, Native American owned and operated company that produces the highly acclaimed TANKA Bar and a line of meat and fruit products, announced today the closing of a multi-million-dollar equity capital investment. The effort will support NANF’s growth as it seeks to reclaim its position as the original, award-winning, highly popular bison and berry snack bar that replicates a time-honored recipe of their Lakota ancestors.

Multi-million dollar investment for TANKA to bring bison back to the lands, lives and economy of Native American people.

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“We wanted to provide an opportunity for investors to make a big difference in the lives of others by attacking the root cause of generational poverty,” said Sherman. “For our Native Communities to see how the business and the mission can regain its original role as the leader in the meat snacking category while we continue to attract like-minded partners and investors is exciting.”

Clearinghouse CDFI has been investing in TANKA since 2011. “Being involved with Native American Natural Foods has been a privilege and a humbling honor,” said Douglas Bystry, President and CEO of Clearinghouse CDFI. “The DNA of our capital pairs well with the DNA of NANF’s enterprise. The founders, leaders and partners of NANF, at the core, have blended a proud and resilient heritage with a disciplined business culture that is intentional about achieving sustainable profits and mission goals. Wealth building in Indian Country is far reaching and we want to be there with NANF each step of the way. We are proud to be part of a group of committed lenders, investors, partners, suppliers and customers who have come together because of NANF’s people, purpose and, of course, its awesome products.”

NANF’s TANKA meat and fruit products come in three smoky-sweet varieties including: Slow Smoked Original, Spicy Pepper and Apple Orange Peel, that retail for under \$5. The centuries-old traditional recipe is unique to Native Americans and is often referred to as *wasna* or *pemmican*. It is made with prairie-fed bison, tart-sweet cranberries and Native American grown wild rice. The products offer seven grams of protein, are minimally processed, with no nitrites or nitrates, antibiotics or added hormones. The bars, bites and sticks are free of gluten, MSG, nuts, trans fats, soy and lactose and rich in Omega-3 fatty acids.

To expand NANF’s customer base and geography, Niman Ranch, the nation’s leading sustainable meat brand with over 750 independent farmers and ranchers, has joined NANF’s growth strategy as a technical advisor and partner with a hands-on approach that includes senior staff working directly with NANF. “The financial independence of the Native owned and operated TANKA goes to the heart of our mission to support sustainable agriculture and resilient rural communities,” said Chris Oliviero, General Manager, Niman Ranch. “By providing operating, marketing, communication and financial support, we will help ensure added value for this important mission and purpose driven business.”

"Congratulations to the team at Native American Natural Foods. This has been a long time coming. We are excited to officially be a part of Karlene, Mark and Dawn’s vision and look forward to helping introduce

TANKA to more consumers nationwide,” said Bob Dineen, CEO of Rocky Mountain Natural Meats, a supporter of the company since its inception.

“NANF is one of those quintessential companies whose success benefits the larger community. NANF’s commitments to Native ownership, to the land and restoration of traditional bison, to healthy foods and sustainable practices, as well as to their Native cultural values, makes NANF an important leader in a resilient, regenerative economy,” said Ann Whittemore, Highlands Associates’ Director of Impact Investments. Within the last two years, Highlands directly, through its DAF (3:23 Fund) and in partnership with its sister organizations, has consciously directed its efforts to Indigenous, Black, and other under-funded communities of color, resulting in investments in over 30 Black and Native-owned and/or led businesses, CDFIs, equity funds, and non-profits. “They’ve put in the work, weathered some storms, and have come out with strong partnerships and leadership, an in-demand product, and more financial viability than ever before. Highlands’ 3:23 Fund is proud to partner with NANF and looks forward to the future growth and success of this company!”

“We created the TANKA Bar and now other products, with a vision of building a reservation-based brand capable of helping to build a new economic future for the Lakota people,” said Mark Tilsen, co-founder of NANF. “This new structure with our investors and partners will help make this shared vision a reality.”

[Native American Natural Foods, LLC](#), is focused on creating a family of nationally branded buffalo-based food products that are delicious and that promote a Native American way of wellness that feeds mind, body, and spirit. By adding value to traditional Native food products, using modern scientific methods and the least amount of processing possible, Native American Natural Foods innovates value-added products for the U.S. consumer marketplace. The TANKA Bar was responsible for creating the first meat snacking category in retail markets. [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). For more information, please visit NANF’s website at [TANKAbar.com](#).

[Candide Group](#) directs capital away from an extractive global economy towards investments dedicated to social justice and sustainability. In other words, we’re making #realtymoney moves and changing culture.

[Clearinghouse Community Development Financial Institution \(Clearinghouse CDFI\)](#)

Clearinghouse CDFI addresses unmet credit needs throughout the U.S. and in Indian Country through direct lending, equity investments, and financial assistance. For over 23 years, Clearinghouse CDFI has helped bridge the gap between conventional lending standards and the needs of low-income, distressed, and communities of color. Clearinghouse CDFI is also a B Corp—a certification received from the nonprofit B Lab. B Corps are companies who meet rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, transparency, and accountability, and use business as a force for good. More information is available at: [www.ccdfi.com](#).

[Highlands Associates](#) is a socially-responsible private investor based in California. We invest toward a green economy, in non-extractive sectors such as sustainable agriculture and forestry, local food systems, renewable energy, and local community-building enterprises.

[Niman Ranch](#) is the largest farmer and rancher network in the Western Hemisphere to be 100 percent third-party-certified under the Certified Humane® program. Their community of more than 740 small, independent U.S. family farmers and ranchers adhere to some of the strictest animal welfare protocols in the industry. Follow Niman Ranch on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

[Rocky Mountain Natural Meats](#) works with family-owned bison ranches throughout the West to produce America’s leading bison brand Great Range Premium Bison, sold in premier grocery stores across America.

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This press release and other statements made from time to time by NANF may contain express and implied statements relating to NANF's future financial condition, results of operations, corporate objectives, and other financial and business matters, which are considered forward-looking statements. These forward-looking statements are necessarily speculative and speak only as of the date made, and are subject to numerous assumptions, risks and uncertainties, all of which may change over time. Actual results could differ materially from those expected or implied by such forward-looking statements. Risks and uncertainties which could cause NANF's actual results to differ materially and adversely from such forward-looking statements include (but are not limited to) economic conditions affecting the industry in which NANF operates; economic, political and competitive forces affecting NANF's business; NANF's ability to successfully execute its business plan; NANF's ability to identify and address risks as such risks arise; and that management's analysis of these risks and factors could be incorrect, and/or that the strategies developed to address them could be unsuccessful. Any statements made that are not historical facts should be considered to be forward-looking statements. You should not place undue reliance on any forward-looking statements. NANF undertakes no obligation to update forward-looking statements or to make any public announcement when NANF considers forward-looking statements to no longer be accurate, whether as a result of new information of future events, except as may be required by applicable law or regulation.

<https://tanka-brand.myshopify.com/collections>

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NATIVE AMERICAN NATURAL FOODS, LLC

Release Summary

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On the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, 90 miles from the nearest city and the third poorest county in the U.S., a team of Native Americans are revitalizing their nation by returning to their roots and believing in the strength of the buffalo.



By Denise Shoukas

Inspiration

Karlene Hunter, a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, has spent more than 25 years working on educational and economic development on the Pine Ridge Reservation, an area with steep unemployment and rampant obesity. In 2007, Hunter and her business partner Mark Tilsen started Native American Natural Foods, producing a line of buffalo products made on the reservation, including Tanka Bar, Tanka Bites, Tanka Dogs and Tanka Wild. Their goal was to build a national brand strong enough to improve the diets, economy and lives of the 35,000 tribal members.

“More than 100 years ago, the Lakota [Indians] were put on this reservation and our whole way of life was taken away,” Hunter says. “The buffalo provided our economic needs. In order to revitalize our

culture, we had to revitalize who we were and where we came from.” She continues: “We looked at all the land around us and thought, Why aren’t we using this?”

They started by creating a bar based on a traditional food called *wasna*, a pounded mix of dried buffalo meat and berries. “People said you have to use phosphates. Our people never did. We hit on how we can do it naturally by going back to our roots and relying on our buffalo nation again—on what we knew made us a strong, vibrant culture. Then we revamped it to today’s society,” Hunter explains. The buffalo are raised on open grassland, and there is no use of low-level antibiotics, hormones, drug residues or preservatives. The natural foods market took notice, and Hunter landed an account with Whole Foods in 2011. A year earlier, Hunter was named the recipient of the Cliff Adler Heart in Business Award, one of the natural foods industry’s top honors, proving that she and her team had made their mark.

Impact

To date, the company has created 18 fulltime positions, educated hundreds of young people about the history, sustainability and health benefits of lean buffalo, and put hundreds of thousands of dollars back into the community through the purchase of buffalo meat.

“These are career positions,” Hunter asserts. And each job has a ripple effect. “When you come from 70 percent unemployment, one job makes a huge dent in your community. We have ladies that are employed here who then hire babysitters. We’re turning the dollar over more than once.”

They’ve also created the Tanka 501c3, a charitable fund that allows consumers to directly support programs and activities that will help return buffalo to the Great Plains and bring renewed health and opportunity to Native American communities. “We didn’t create this business to get rich. We’re really trying to change our situation, our economy,” Hunter says. “We’re rising to where we began as a strong nation.”