

SWEET BEGINNINGS, LLC



The work of Sweet Beginnings, LLC embodies the triple-bottom-line of sustainability: People, Planet and Prosperity. The social enterprise, launched in 2004 by the North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN), produces a line of all-natural honey and honey-infused body care products under the brand name beelove™. All employees are graduates of NLEN's "U-Turn Permitted" program, a job training and preparedness program for formerly incarcerated individuals.

Once at Sweet Beginnings, U-Turn graduates receive training in a range of green job skills including beekeeping, product preparation and packaging, sales, and business management. The recidivism rate for former Sweet Beginnings employees is below four percent, compared to the national average of 65 percent and the Illinois average of 55 percent.

"We are part of the national effort to define what constitutes a 'Green Job'," notes Brenda Palms-Barber, CEO of Sweet Beginnings. Palms-Barber is an evangelist of sorts, often appearing at sustainability events to tell the real-life green job stories of her employees. She and her employees can speak in-depth about the health benefits of honey, the environmental benefits of pollinators, and the importance of preserving pollinator and other natural habitats – especially in cities like Chicago. And Palms-Barber adds, "It's [also] about the people behind the product... Individuals who want to move on and contribute, getting beyond the stigma that incarceration often brings."

"We are part of the national effort to define what constitutes a 'Green Job'."

Brenda Palms-Barber
CEO, Sweet Beginnings, LLC



KEY STATISTICS

	3,700 pounds of honey harvested in 2014
	383 graduates of Sweet Beginnings training program
	\$260,000 annual total revenue

ABOUT SWEET BEGINNINGS, LLC

Established: **2004**

Location: **North Lawndale, Chicago, IL**

of employees: **4**

Producer of: **Honey and honey-infused body care products**

NAICS code: **112910**

Website: **www.sweetbeginningsllc.com**

ABOUT THE ILLINOIS GOVERNOR'S SUSTAINABILITY AWARD

Since 1987, ISTC has presented Governor's Sustainability Awards to organizations in Illinois that have demonstrated a commitment to sustaining our environmental and economic health.

Any Illinois public or private organization is eligible to apply.

Find out more at:

istc.illinois.edu/govsawards

or email istc-info@illinois.edu



INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

A breakdown of strategies and technologies that help Sweet Beginnings, LLC pursue true sustainability.

People

- ✓ Job training
- ✓ Assistance for formerly incarcerated individuals
- ✓ Environmental awareness

Planet

- ✓ Pollinator education and awareness
- ✓ Restoration of urban habitat for bees and other local pollinators
- ✓ Revival of urban agriculture

Prosperity

- ✓ Beelove™ product line available throughout Chicagoland
- ✓ Social enterprise model

ABOUT ISTC

The Illinois Sustainable Technology Center (ISTC) is a division of the Prairie Research Institute at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

ISTC's mission is to encourage and assist citizens, businesses and government agencies to prevent pollution, conserve natural resources and reduce waste to protect human health and the environment of Illinois and beyond.

Visit our website at: istc.illinois.edu

TN15-123
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O'HARE AIRPORT PARTNERSHIP

In May 2011, Sweet Beginnings, LLC and the North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN) began a unique partnership with the Chicago Department of Aviation (CDA) and the Chicago Department of Family Support Services (DFSS) to install and maintain an apiary (beehives) on O'Hare International Airport property. The apiary is located on the east side of O'Hare in a previously vacant, undeveloped grassy area nestled amidst the existing brush vegetation and scrub trees.

This unique initiative transformed a previously unused area on airport property into a budding apiary that now includes 75 beehives and more than two million bees. The apiary installed at O'Hare is the largest apiary at any airport in the world and the first major on-airport apiary in the U.S. The O'Hare apiary serves as an example of how creative thinking and unique partnerships can generate social, environmental, and economic benefits without requiring significant financial investment or jeopardizing future airport land uses.

The project cost, including installation and maintenance for the beehives (in 2011), was estimated at a little over \$3,000. Sweet Beginnings and the NLEN utilized an existing City of Chicago contract with the DFSS and the CDA so that no airport funding was required to furnish and install the apiary.

About 35 pounds of Certified Naturally Grown beelove™ honey is harvested per year from each O'Hare beehive (75 beehives generate more than 2,500 pounds annually). The honey is processed and sold under the Sweet Beginnings beelove™ product label. Beelove™ products are sold at O'Hare and Midway airports in Hudson News stores operated by HMS Host; and the O'Hare Farmer's Market kiosk. Beelove™ honey is also a featured ingredient at award-winning celebrity chef Rick Bayless's Tortas Frontera restaurant located at the airport terminal.



Honey harvesting at the North Lawndale apiary.



Beelove™ production facility.