



Massachusetts Beverage Business



Maine Distilleries, which produces only Cold River Vodka, is, according to Bob Harkins, Director of Sales and Marketing, "The only 'ground-to-glass' distillery in the nation, where the company controls every aspect of production – from the planting of the potatoes to final bottling. Maine has a good image for quality and craftsmanship and that helps sales, especially in Massachusetts." Cold River Vodka has only been around since November 2005, but experienced 70% growth in 2008.

"This is a crazy business," Harkins said. "A potato farmer who was about to lose his farm six years ago (because of poor sales due to the popularity of the Atkins Diet) called me because he needed to add value to his product and diversify. I had no clue about the vodka business, but I did the research and saw the explosive growth in super premium spirits, especially vodka, and that there was no other potato vodka on the market."

Harkins and his partners, including the farmer, developed the brand and the Freeport, Maine, destination. "Our goal was to create some distinction in a crowded category," Harkin explained. "We knew we were different. We have no money for big advertising, but we received good taste panel reviews and headed to the grass roots for marketing – in the trenches with retail owners and bartenders."

Cold River Vodka does events, such as the Greater Boston Food Bank, and hires key people for sales. "We invest in these people," Harkins said, "and we are committed to expand growth in Massachusetts with the hire of a new sales and marketing representative, Dawn Marie Herrick."

Harkins said Cold River Vodka has been picked up by over 150 restaurants and clubs throughout Massachusetts, and by over 160 liquor stores, "and the addition of Herrick to the Cold River Vodka team is a solid indication that the business is actively continuing its expansion in 2009 and is committed to keeping pace with increased demand throughout the Greater Boston market."