



# Keeping it Local .....

## Towards a Micronesian Product Seal

BY PETER R. BARCINAS

Job creation efforts in Micronesia are focusing on sustainable tourism and the production of local products as these present the most promise to offset the myriad of challenges eroding local traditions.

The initiative “Towards A Micronesian Product Seal” may provide the link to close the perceived gaps amid competing or fragmented development initiatives. Given the growing interest to evaluate the region’s development issues, this initiative helps to guide the discussion with the hope that lessons learned translate into the needed regional transformation.

The Micronesian Product Seal hopes to spark interest in revitalizing support for a true sustainable regional handicrafts strategy. This latest initiative is based on the region’s long history of promoting economic development based on its cultural, agricultural, and local products. For example, the Guam Micronesian Island Fair hosted its 23rd

successful event representing perhaps the longest-running unifying event for everything Guam and Micronesia. This event continues to evolve and remains true to its mission of displaying and promoting the common interests of the region’s indigenous entrepreneurs, manufacturers, traditional artists, and cultural performers.

“Magnificent Micronesia” is the region’s unified tourism initiative intent on delivering a well-organized promotional campaign set to a diverse backdrop of languages, culture, and island settings. The Micronesian Product Seal and unified branding provide a similar practical, value-added strategy while focused on preserving the uniqueness of the different cultures, governments, and the areas natural assets.

While the natural assets and serene tranquil settings abound, the problems of depopulation and unemployment continue to challenge any effort to deliver a sustainable approach for the region. Tourism continues to provide a measure of relief and hope for reversing these trends and ushering in the much-

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needed regional economic transformation.

The region's initiatives outlined by the Micronesian Chiefs Executive Summit (MCES) include positioning education, workforce development, and economic development as integral strategies working together to deliver the wanted outcomes in education, economic development, and employment also known as the power of e3. This e3 portfolio is part of the

Ponape), and Republic of the Marshalls—have all explored their assets for investment and all have been based on extractive strategies. Fisheries and ocean-related enterprise remains a flagship for the islands each playing a significant role in the regional economy.

According to the Office of Insular Affairs, U.S. Department of Interior, the region's population is estimated at over 400,000. Imagine the

broader regional initiatives sponsored by the MCES to include sustainable energy, environmental protection, telecommunication, tourism, and healthcare.

The Regional Workforce Development Council (RWDC), working through the MCES working committees, introduced the idea of a regional value-added initiative product seal. The Made in Micronesia Seal preserves the individual identity of each of the islands while collectively promoting the region as a visitor destination.

Through the RWDC's workforce strategic plan, "Micronesia Works," the focus on entrepreneurial opportunities or self-employment workforce strategies seeks to align and update this entrepreneurial initiative leveraging the idea embedded through the country of origin strategy. This can serve as the "Keep it Local" effort intended to promote a sustainable made-in-region initiative.

In the past, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas (CNMI) took part in export trade programs capitalizing on the terms of trade laws providing tariff advantages for eligible products intended for the United States. Investment incentives attracted foreign investors to establish a local presence in areas that provided tariff-free or quota-based advantages. Investments were made in garment and watch assembly and both Guam and CNMI benefited from the jobs created until these thriving industries closed mostly due to increased pressure to revisit tariff rules and protectionist rules.

Like Guam and CNMI, each of the different island entities—Republic of Palau, Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, Yap, Kosrae,

range of issues associated with the increasing demand for imported goods underscored by the challenges for products made under the right protectionist structure for jurisdictional branding strategies. The interest to promote a unified regional branding continues to change from the efforts of the Pacific Travel Association promoting Micronesia as a regional destination.

The Micronesian Product Seal offers a unique advantage for area entrepreneurs to exploit the many opportunities to promote the "Keep it Local" initiative. Made in Guam and Grown in Guam initiatives offer unique opportunities to deliver a portion of an import-substitution strategy through this effort whereby enabling the region to promote their version of "keeping it local" and keeping dollars circulating in Micronesia. While the structures for micro businesses exist, such as the Pacific Business Development Center, other collaborators are needed to deliver a regional sustainability brand that keeps dollars circulating locally while preserving the MCES goals.

The opportunities to profit through sustainable tourism development provide Micronesia many yet-to-be-discovered returns on investments for keeping economic activities local. These efforts work toward preserving traditional ways of life while capitalizing on the opportunities of being at the fringe of a globalized market area. Combined with the Micronesian Product Seal initiative these serve the sustainable and evolving tourism agenda in the region. •

## References

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## RECOMMENDED READING

Magnificent Micronesia  
[magnificentmicronesia.com](http://magnificentmicronesia.com)

Workforce Investment Agency  
Micronesian Chiefs Executive Summit  
[wia.gov.mp/mces.php](http://wia.gov.mp/mces.php)