

The power of partnership to service customer demand

One of the major benefits of operating a global business is the ability to source the very highest quality minerals for our customers – wherever they are.

Demand for Ukrainian clay and Turkish feldspar have been steadily increasing for some time, driven by growth in the porcelain tile market. Manufacturers in the US and Mexico value the Ukrainian clay's low carbon and iron content, and its chemical makeup that allows for faster firing. The Turkish feldspar meanwhile, offers a low cost alternative to some of the flux minerals available in North America.

Our offices in the US and Mexico have been exploring opportunities with their European colleagues to open up the broader Sibelco portfolio to their customers for some time. A trading company, Unimin Specialty Minerals, was set up in Mexico in 2007 and the business had handled several mid-sized imports into Mexico over recent years.

However in 2015 the initiative was truly put to the test when an Italian tile producer decided to expand its product portfolio at its US plant, and approached the business for help.

With strong collaboration between Sibelco's US and Mexican operations and Sibelco's team in Italy, feldspar, clay and bentonite were shipped in bulk ocean vessels across the Atlantic and via the river system from the Gulf of Mexico to the customer's tile plant in Tennessee.

Soon after, our Mexican operations received an order for Ukrainian clay for another tile producer in San Luis Potosi.

Shipping into Mexico is complicated by a less developed port infrastructure, so while the business is currently shipping on demand, it will soon start

to warehouse and deliver locally, starting with an additional 5,000 metric tons being shipped with this latest order. By stocking locally, the team will be able to pursue additional business, while offering the highest quality product more quickly and at a lower cost.

Customers with operations in Europe and North America have been quick to catch on to the benefits of Sibelco's global approach to product sourcing; imports continue to arrive for the Tennessee tile producer, while sales of Ukrainian clay have grown within the frits and glazes industry.

Further to the success of the clay and feldspar initiative, a new division, North America Trading, will add structure to inter-company trading and open opportunities to supply other globally sourced Sibelco minerals.

