



Technology & Innovation

Smartgrain Complete Omega 3

By EduTransfer Design Associates and Haywire Creative

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Dale and Marianne Donaldson started Everspring Farms at Ilderton, Ontario 25 years ago producing niche poultry products and today have expanded to a diversified, family-owned agricultural and food business. Through innovation and collaboration, they now produce, process and market unique organic foods that serve the restaurant and gourmet food trade as well as the emerging functional food sector.

“Our small flock of ducks and geese expanded to include all types of poultry that are not under quota and over the years we have developed an alliance with a network of breeder farms and growing operations,” says Dale Donaldson. “Our processing plant employs 20 people and supplies products throughout Ontario to restaurants, food stores, fresh markets and other suppliers.”

About ten years ago, the Donaldson's saw an opportunity in the trend towards functional foods, or food products that cater to the health and wellness industry. They started with a unique process of sprouting of grains and seeds and have added several other products, all manufactured at their functional food processing facility in Seaforth, Ontario. Products include organic sprouted grain flours and powders, organic barley grass juice and sea buckthorn juice. Donaldson grows his own barley, but relies on contracts with area growers for other crops. Other products in development include chicory root for inulin production, a zero trans fat substitute for shortening in baking and Smartgrain EPA/DHA enriched grains and seeds.

Smartgrain® Complete Omega 3

“In collaboration with Dr. Arun Nagpurkar, we've developed a patented technology to add nutrients in conjunction with the grain and seed sprouting process to produce functional food products,” explains Donaldson. “Under the brand Smartgrain® Complete Omega 3, we have been able to include the essential fatty acids DHA and EPA, only available from marine sources, in the sprouted grains and seeds.” Smartgrain products are currently available as wholesale ingredients and as retail products in over 60 health food stores across Canada. Donaldson notes they are also working with potential buyers in the US, Europe and Asia.

“The main interest in Smartgrain is as an ingredient in food manufacturing, such as for breads, cookies or other products,” explains Donaldson. “Manufacturers can include Smartgrain with their regular recipe, with added benefit of being able to make an associated nutritional label claim for the omega 3. Through this patented process, we can provide DHA in a food format without all of the other additives that are normally associated with microencapsulation and help

“We believe there is a long-term future for selling what we used to consider commodity-based products and adding some value or information to them. Functional foods are basic foods that agriculture produces with a specific component targeted to some kind of health benefit that is proven scientifically,” says Dale Donaldson.

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companies produce products with a cleaner label. We strongly believe it is important to have food in as close to its natural state as possible, with added benefits."

Food Innovation Opportunities and Challenges

Donaldson sees collaboration as an important strategy to bring new and innovative foods products, such as Smartgrain, to market. "We do enjoy the process of innovation and creativity," says Donaldson. "The people that work with us find this development process very exciting and obviously there are lots of opportunities when working in an area of developing things that are new."



However, along with the exciting opportunities come challenges. "As with any new product there are financial barriers and usually never enough money to do things the way you really want to do them," explains Donaldson. Another challenge is the regulatory environment and the time and effort to meet requirements. "Overall there are lots of positive things to our regulatory environment, which brands Canadian products as safe and healthy. However, trying to meet all of the regulatory requirements to the letter of the law is a very slow and time consuming process."

Food safety is another important component, but Donaldson notes the bar keeps moving and changing. "HACCP programs are a basic requirement, but increasingly markets require another level of standards such as Safe Quality Food (SQF) programs and others. Developing and implementing these programs takes a lot of time and money, even when you do them in-house, and when we move into the auditing component that will be very expensive."

Donaldson adds that the regulatory and food safety requirements are a significant barrier for new companies, who don't have the resources, staff, time or money in place at the start. "It is a 'catch 22' for companies. You need to have these in order to make a sale, but the financial challenge of meeting the traceability and other components before you have sales makes it difficult for companies to survive long enough to get sales to justify the cost and time of these programs."



Donaldson is convinced that despite these challenges, opportunities exist for new and innovative products. "Even with economic uncertainties, data shows these sectors have not suffered the decline in interest that other areas have. Consumers seem to be willing to put their spending dollar towards real whole foods, local foods and foods that provide a health benefit. Governments have recognized a strong link between food and health care, and agriculture is well positioned to help provide innovative foods and products for health and wellness."

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