Processing Case Study:
InfraReady Products

Simpler, better, quicker pulse cooking - a new approach


Mark Pickard

In 1994, a farmer-owned company called the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool was looking to see how value could be added to their commodities, especially to pulses. Farmer's son, Mark Pickard did the original work that identified the opportunity offered by a combination of adding moisture and applying infrared heat. The process, known as micronisation, has clear benefits. It enables reduced cooking times for lentils, peas and beans that give new opportunities for innovation in the factory and for convenience in the kitchen.

Mark *says "I started with 3 people, no products and no customers. We had to develop both the market and the products. Five years later I took the company private with a partner to form 'InfraReady Products 1998 Ltd'. I see innovation as either incremental or transformational. Either way, it's not commercial unless there's genuine customer benefit. As we developed new ideas and increased our range, we found a whole series of advantages. For example, better water absorption, higher water retention, improved shelf stability and better food safety."*

The market for a quicker cooking pulse has proved extensive.

"As you go to higher altitudes, the temperature at which water boils gets lower. At 8,500ft (2,600m), Bogotá in Colombia is the highest city of its size in the world and water boils at 92 degrees. Pulses such as beans, peas, and lentils are eaten very frequently, especially in soups. Quick cooking pulses are a real benefit to them. Micronised pulses can be flaked or ground for processors to use as versatile ingredients. I see food technologists innovating to create a form that is familiar to consumers but offers the extra benefits of the pulses, such as bread, crackers and dips. Also, I've seen micronised pulse thickeners used to replace modified starch. The product label then has a more natural looking ingredient list. That's important for some consumers."

"Here in Canada we're a hotbed of activity on pulse innovation; from plant breeding and crop growing[11] through to novel utilisation in processing. We do need to make sure the health benefits are better understood by consumers, but I believe that the real challenge is to put that positive nutrition into more everyday foods. It's not about changing cultures; it's about improving the health benefits of food recipes."

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