

THE POWER OF OMEGA-3

O&T Farms enters the functional food marketplace

BY KATIE BOYCE

Regina-based O&T Farms is on the cutting edge of the functional foods industry. Research from the University of Saskatchewan and other independent institutions shows the company's line of livestock feed components significantly boost the amount of Omega-3 fatty acids in meat, dairy and eggs. In the human functional foods market, Omega-3 has been shown to have significant health benefits including reduced risk of heart disease and stroke, decreased symptoms of hypertension, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and improved joint health.

"We believe the growing functional foods market has huge potential right now," says Tim Wiens, president and CEO. "Our customers are excited because our feed components produce high Omega-3 levels without affecting taste, providing a consumer friendly, natural source of these desirable fatty acids."

O&T Farms achieves these high Omega-3 levels by combining flaxseed with pulses in its patented dry extrusion process.

"Dry extrusion makes the sum of the parts greater as a whole," explains Wiens. "It utilizes heat and pressure to create a fusion process that strips away the anti-nutritional properties that exist

and it also makes the protein and energy more digestible."

O&T Farms' vegetable-based, flax-rich products also have outstanding results for animals. In a study supported by Sun-West Food Laboratory in Saskatoon and O&T Farms, adding LinPRO to the diet of laying hens at an inclusion rate of 15 per cent resulted in an Omega-3 fatty acid content of greater than 400mg per each 52g egg, as well as an 8.5 per cent increase in egg production and a 9 per cent improvement in feed efficiency as compared to a flax only diet.

In another independent study by the University of Saskatchewan, cows fed 1.5kg of DairyPRO daily not only had an increased milk yield of 1 to 3kg, but also produced milk with a higher Omega-3 content while maintaining the same solid non-fat to fat ratio.

Producers also appreciate the other advantages of dry extrusion including reduced feed flow and dust problems and extended shelf life of the feed components.

To top off these benefits, O&T Farms follows strict quality control programs that ensure both product safety and employee safety, including meeting CFIA and HACCP requirements and also completing Foss NIR testing on each outgoing load.

With its solid product line, O&T Farms has been expanding its customer base across Canada and internationally since the company started to focus solely on manufacturing livestock components in 1996. The next step for the company is to enter the mainstream marketplace, says Wiens.

"We've pursued the functional feed category since we obtained our patent on Omega-3 products in 2007. The challenge has been to get producers, processors, and consumers properly educated to buy and consume Omega-3 meats."

The task of entering a marketplace is not new for Wiens, whose family has a long history of entrepreneurship.

His father and uncle started O&T Farms in 1967 by supplying eggs to Canada Safeway in Saskatchewan. The business venture, which began after moving on from a trucking business in Manitoba, was very successful. By the 1980's, O&T Farms was the second largest producer in Canada. Over the years, O&T Farms has been involved in a range of agribusinesses, including layer, broiler, and pullet production, equipment sales, and international agri-value management projects.

More recently, under Wiens – who is highly involved in the provincial business scene, including serving as director for both the Canadian Western Agribition



and STEP, as well as chair of both Enterprise Saskatchewan's Agri-value Sector committee and the Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan – O&T Farms has shifted its present focus to the functional foods industry. This change began while addressing a problem in O&T Farms' former egg layer operations.

"Our research into livestock feed components really began in 1996-97 when we were looking at ways to deal with the replacement of our flocks," says Wiens.

He explains that, at the time, the company began paying to have flocks removed from its barns, a task they had received money for in the past. Instead of taking on the extra expense, the company turned the problem into a new business venture.

"When entrepreneurs see an opportunity, they measure it and make a decision to move forward or to wait for other options," says Wiens. "We believed we

could turn this cost into profit so we put together a business model that would allow us to get value from our replacement flocks. We were operating a feed mill at the time, so we looked at the equipment already available to the feed industry. We had worked with dry extrusion in the early 1980s, so we leveraged our knowledge, purchased equipment, and ventured into a new business."

"We looked at what our opportunities to grow in the poultry industry were versus the feed component business, and there was more of an opportunity for growth in the feed business," he says.

He credits the book *Good to Great* by Jim Collins for providing O&T Farms with guidance during this transition, explaining that the book encourages companies to "determine what you're passionate about, what you're best at, and what makes money. O&T Farms was known as an egg and poultry business, but every-

thing evolves." He adds that the company looked ahead to "what we could be and what we could do."

In the years to come, it's this courageous entrepreneurial spirit backed by a solid product line that will help O&T Farms succeed as an industry leader in the emerging functional foods marketplace. **GV**