

Seventh Day Adventist NGO expands Cambodia's into health food market

FRIDAY, 29 APRIL 2011 15:00 STUART ALAN BECKER



THE Vissot NGO, supported by the Seventh Day Adventist Church, is making peanut butter, rice and peanut “pops”, peanut “crumbles”, granola and Cambodian-style curry in a small factory in Tuol Kork.

The Vissot organisation was started in 1999 to provide training, employment and personal development for Cambodians and now has evolved into an increasingly successful health food manufacturer that consumes about one ton of peanuts every month and keeps 15 employees busy full-time.



Vissot's traditional Cambodia curry. Photo Courtesy Vissot'

According to Business Advisor Gary Solomon, who works with Cambodian manager Sokdararith Prak, both Seventh Day Adventists, the idea now is to make the business self-sustaining by producing and delivering healthy food products to the population.

“This is about supporting people and teaching them to lead healthier lives,” Solomon said.

Solomon, his wife and sons closed down their Sydney, Australia, car mechanic business to come to Cambodia and work with Vissot.

“My wife and I felt like we needed to do some kind of service,” Solomon said.

The peanuts are local Cambodian-grown bought from a supplier who also roasts them. Interestingly, the Seventh Day Adventist church owns the Sanitarium Health Food Company, based in Australia and New Zealand, which produces the very popular Weet-bix family of products, which is why Solomon's predecessor thought food manufacturing would be a good idea for a Cambodian NGO.

Kellogg's of Battle Creek, Michigan, was also founded by Seventh Day Adventist WK Kellogg in 1906, and by 2008, the company had sales revenue of US\$13 billion.

Here in Cambodia, carrying on the Seventh Day Adventist tradition of a focus on industries for healthy foods, Vissot has a new granola product just being launched which includes cashews, almonds and rolled oats. Other Vissot products include Peanut Crumbles, which resemble cookies in a shrink-wrapped package which sell at retail at places like Lucky Supermarkets for about \$1.80.

Another product, Peanut Pops (\$1.25), are based on peanuts and rice, as well as jars of both crunchy and smooth peanut butter (about \$2.65 per jar) and traditional Cambodian curry in jars and packets, which is described as a mild curry with a herbal lemony flavour and are ideal for mixing with coconut milk and

vegetables, chicken or other meat, according to Solomon.

The Seventh Day Adventist religious doctrine tends toward an emphasis on health, in which vegetarianism is encouraged, along with no smoking or drinking, and is similar to both Jewish and Islamic food rules – no pork, shellfish or fish that don't have scales.