

# SO! Nutritious seeks to fortify with protein and micronutrients

FRIDAY, 29 APRIL 2011 15:00 STUART ALAN BECKER



FOR Graham Taylor, protein is a key for the health of the Cambodian population. A former milking machine salesman for the New Zealand dairy industry, Taylor now runs So! Nutritious, a social enterprise that works toward profitability by producing high-protein drinks made with soy and spirulina.

When he worked with New Zealand's dairy farmers Taylor learned some important principles about the rapid-growth relationship between protein and bacteria – and the importance of keeping equipment in a clean and sterile environment.

“Bacteria and protein are naturally attracted to each other,” he said.

In addition to employing a full-time chemist and food technologist at So! Nutritious, Taylor and his team also co-process food products with other factories.

A former advisor to the Association of the Blind in Cambodia, Taylor realised the importance of nutrition in the Cambodian diet. So many Cambodian children become blind as a result of a lack of nutrition in their diets which leads to an under-developed immune system, which is unable to fight infections and which results in blindness or poor vision.

He also spent time working through income generation activities for blind Cambodians in the countryside and is also a board member of Asian Outreach Cambodia and Prison Fellowship Cambodia.

In September 2009, he bought some equipment from Hagar Soya and since then has been growing the So! Nutritious brand of products as a social enterprise.

“Nutritional food at an affordable price for the people who need it,” was how Taylor described his vision. “So we work closely with NGOs.”

Taylor said Cambodia has a high percentage of poor people who come to the city from the provinces to work with high expectations of sending money home. With growing food costs, Taylor sees good nutrition as essential for the health of the population.

Project development is funded by donors and grants as it moves toward being self-sustaining. Three development projects are now underway and are at various stages, which include spirulina development in tanks from 100 square metres to 500 square metres. Spirulina is grown in brackish water ponds or tanks and looks rather like algae, and is a species of cyanobacteria, very rich in protein and nutrients and increasingly popular as a health food. Another project is a rice porridge supplement for babies, to assist with child development. Soya production development includes developing various flavours to assist the development and volume sales into the commercial market.



Graham Taylor of SO! Nutritious.

“If we sold 750 litres of soya milk every day, we could be commercially sustainable,” he said.

Taylor does not draw any salary from So! Nutritious and his own expenses are covered by his church, the Te Awanutu Bible Chapel in the central part of New Zealand’s North Island.

His Christian beliefs tend toward a “business as mission” paradigm, which he describes as “Christians helping people through business”.

Taylor took time to answer a few questions about the So! Nutritious social enterprise.

**Q: Why is spirulina so important nutritionally and why is Cambodia ideal for growing it? How much do you produce a day?**

A: Spirulina has 70 percent protein with 15 other micron-nutrients. It is recognised and often referred to as “nature’s super-food”. Spirulina needs sunlight hours for it to grow, so consequently spirulina grows even in the wet season in Cambodia as the sunlight hours are still long. The high level of protein with the micronutrients assists in building the human immune system to fight infections. Because of its high protein, spirulina is ideal for those fighting infections and long term diseases like HIV.

**Q: What products do you now have? What flavours and how do you distribute them?**

A: Soya milk with three levels of fortification. Std Soy Milk has 35 percent protein, So! Kids Soya Milk has 25 percent RDA, So! Fortified has 50 percent RDA. (RDA is recommended daily allowance of micronutrients) Flavours include mung bean, sweet corn, strawberry, honey soy milk and chocolate.

We also have a Green Lemon Tea sweetened with honey from Mondulkiri.

Spirulina in 3gm sachets, which is the daily dose per person: but we also aim to have spirulina in tablet form in the near future.

Corn Snacks, with micro nutrients iron, zinc and vitamin C.

Borbor Plus, which is a fortified soy rice blended powder with a premix of 15 micro-nutrients added to rice porridge for babies six months to 36 months, which helps the child develop an immune system as well as allowing the connections to be made as the brain develops in the child.

**Q: Where would you like to sell your products in places that you don’t now have them?**

A: It would be great to be able to produce milk and sell or gift it on behalf of donors to orphanages, communities’ homes. So many national NGOs struggle with finance to support the children in their care adequately. The international community could support their work by funding So! Products, which we can supply to children in the care of local NGOs. This would help with volume sales which would assist the price being more affordable for all. Our products are FMPG, (Fast Moving Perishable Goods) which require high volume sales with low margins. As we increase volume, we will increase penetration and access of our products to the poorer Cambodian population who will benefit hugely with the increased nutritional value in each So! product.