

THE HINDU
Business Line

Health aspects of rice bran oil gain focus

FMCGs look to it for nutrient labelling, undertake trial

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ITC Foods' Bingo, Nestle's instant noodles and Haldiram snack could soon become healthier. They are all believed to be undertaking trials with the high-in-nutrients rice bran oil (RBO).

"Nestle, ITC and Haldiram have all taken samples of rice bran oil for conducting trials to see the suitability of rice bran oil," says Mr A.R. Sharma, Chairman of AP Organics, the makers of Ricella. The brand is marketed in a few northern markets through modern trade.

PepsiCo's Frito Lays has already shifted to rice bran oil for many of its snack brands. A host of cooking oil brands such as Dhara, Sundrop and Saffola have already woken up to the health bene-

fits of this oil, introducing "heart"-y versions of edible oil blends that include RBO.

Rice bran is the outer layer of the brown rice kernel that remains after the husk has been removed.

HEALTH FOCUS

AP Organics, which provides the oil to most of these companies, is betting on the health-conscious consumer to augment the availability of this oil. The AP Solvex Group company based at Dhuri in Punjab will be investing Rs 25 crore to increase its current 350 tonne-a-day capacity by 250 tonnes.

Mr Sharma — who was recently awarded the First National Award-2007 for Research and Development in the Medium Enterprises

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category by the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Government of India and was felicitated by the Prime Minister recently — holds a process patent for the processing of refined RBO.

"Everyone is looking at rice bran oil. The move is due to both growing health awareness and the nutrient labelling that FMCG companies are expected to implement," says Mr Sharma.

His own company has developed rice bran nutraceuticals as dietary supplements. The company is in talks with

Chennai-based Parry Nutraceuticals and NatuRi Corporation for the US market. "We are soliciting interest from nutraceutical companies. We are not a marketing company and would like to tie up with someone who can market these products," says Mr Sharma, who believes there is a huge potential for these by-products.

LOOKING OVERSEAS

In the US, RBO, which the Japanese have been consuming for more than 40 years, is sold under the health food segment, he points out. In-

dia, which recognised the oil as an edible one only in '86, has huge potential. "As the world's second largest producer of paddy, after China, India has a huge potential," he says.

Currently, only 2.5 lakh tonnes of refined rice bran oil are produced annually, and Sharma believes India could produce 12 lakh tonnes of crude rice bran oil from the current eight lakhs a year. The oil, nutrient enriched, he claims, is healthier than olive oil and canola oil, and has cholesterol lowering properties. Retail prices of the oil are between Rs 75 and 80 a litre and have, like all other edible oils, grown by Rs 15 over the last year. Though, adds Mr Sharma, prices have come down by Rs 5 in the last month.