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Ancient seed boosts investment in Aussie farming

A little known ancient seed has emerged as the most lucrative crop option for Stage 2 of the State and Federal Government's \$415 million investment in the Ord river irrigation development, now strongly supported by a major national supply partnership.

The partnership between The Chia Company and national bakery network Bakers Delight, will see the production of Chia in the Ord River region double in 2010 with the industry on track to be worth \$20 million in just five years time. It will help provide an established industry perfectly suited to the Kimberly region, when Stage 2 of the Ord River irrigation scheme rolls out in 2013, and a profitable crop option for local farmers that will help them see a significant return on their investment.

First used by the Aztecs, the Chia plant produces a tiny seed that is the richest plant source combining Omega 3, dietary fibre, protein and antioxidants making it the most nutritious grain available.

Fourth generation Western Australian grain farmer, John Foss, recognised the demand for a functional food crop and set about researching global trends impacting food production, water availability, energy and consumer health and wellbeing. Impressed with the nutritional attributes of the Chia seed – and with a history of agriculture innovation – he established The Chia Company in 2004 and successfully harvested the first crop in the Kimberley region five years ago.

In agronomic terms, the company has progressed 20 years in just five thanks to the growing consumer trend for more natural, functional foods and the ideal growing conditions in the Ord. The Chia Company has progressed to become the largest producer of the Chia seed in the world.

"Compared to countries where Chia is grown such as Bolivia, Mexico and Peru, the distinct advantage we have growing here is our climate, and quality control systems," explained Foss, managing director of The Chia Company.

"The Kimberly region is the ideal location to grow Chia, it is a very difficult seed to grow and the Ord farming region combines all the environmental factors such as soil type, climate, day length, latitude at precisely 15 degrees south of the equator and most importantly the ample water source from Lake Argyle. This allows us to ensure a sustainable supply of the seed all year round and maintain its purity and nutritional profile."

Already an international success story in the United States, Canada and Europe – where 95 per cent of Australian grown Chia has been exported to date – Foss said as a result of this new partnership he is able to achieve the vision of contributing to consumer health while also remaining confident about expanding Chia production and continuing to develop the worlds best supply chain for Chia in the Ord River farming region.

"Chia should be consumed regularly, so it makes sense that we are able to incorporate Chia in an every day product. The supply to 650 Bakers Delight bakeries across Australia and New Zealand gives us the confidence to keep growing our business and delivering the health benefits to the population," Foss added.

Chris Caldwell, general manager at Bakers Delight, said the business was pleased to be able to support the Australian farming and agricultural industry through this exclusive national supply partnership and ultimately bring the health benefits of this ancient seed into Australian homes. "Chia is considered one of nature's complete superfoods and will be included in our new range of daily baked Chia bread in its whole seed form," Caldwell added.

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