

Brothers unlock power of spuds

POTATO STARCH PRODUCT SHOWN TO IMPROVE GUT HEALTH IN CLINICAL TRIAL

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Armed with positive results from a clinical trial conducted by the St. Boniface Albrechtsen Research Centre, a Manitoba company is now full speed ahead shipping a natural health product that can provide relief for people — especially seniors — with digestive issues.

MSPrebiotics Inc. of Carberry has been extracting a digestion-resistant starch supplement from potatoes for more than a decade and selling it to hog producers.



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Michelle Alfa (left) conducted a clinical trial of MSPrebiotics' product. Earl McLaren (centre) and his brother, Derek McLaren, hope it will help open doors to the U.S. market.

Having plenty of that kind of starch — prebiotics — in the gut provides food for probiotics, contributes to good health and lessens all sorts of gastrointestinal discomfort.

"We were doing very well with hog producers and from there the logical next step was a clinical trial (to test for human treatment)," said CEO Earl McLaren, who had learned piglet gut biology is used as a model for pre-human trials for many kinds of treatments.

The results of the trial, just published in the peer-reviewed journal *Clinical Nutrition*, showed MSPrebiotics' product significantly increased the abundance of good bacteria. Elderly people taking MSPrebiotic had reduced constipation and an increase in the kind of good bacteria the probiotics consume, contributing to better gut health.

The clinical trial, led by Michelle Alfa, a clinical microbiologist at St. Boniface, found use of the MSPrebiotic significantly reduced bad bacteria and increased good bacteria in trial participants 70 years old and older and also in a participant group aged 30 to 50. It also created a meaningful decrease in blood glucose levels and insulin resistance, which will be the subject of a subsequent peer-reviewed article.

McLaren and his brother, Derek, have been partners in business for more than 40 years, starting with a potato farm in the Carberry area.

They started working on the starch extract in 2004 with good results and plenty of demand from hog producers.

The move to the natural supplement for the human market started a few years ago.

The McLaren brothers have invested more than \$2 million in plant and office expansion, have doubled their staff to 15 and expect that could

grow to 50 as marketing and sales ramp up.

"We're now getting big into the marketing and global awareness side of things," said Derek McLaren.

The product is now in about 50 stores in the Toronto area and last week, Vita Health started carrying it in its Manitoba stores. The company hopes to break into the U.S. market in California and they fully expect to expand into other international markets.

"If you have clinical data... that is golden when you have that to prove the efficacy and safety," Derek said. "We are really excited as we enter the market now."