

Leon Fung

An eye on world markets

A new company producing dairy products has their eye on the global market – SONITA CHANDAR reports.

A new player in dairy and nutritional products is open for business and soon to be fully operational.

Auckland-based Winston Nutritional general manager Leon Fung says the plant at Mt Wellington is open for business and will run 24 hours a day with a capacity of 20,000 metric tonnes a year and eventually employ 50 to 60 staff.

Already, Winston has invested more than \$30 million upgrading the plant which was previously Nutricia's manufacturing plant built in the early 1990s by Douglas Pharmaceutical. Although the company will primarily be producing products destined for China, it has an eye on the global market as well as here in New Zealand.

"Our investment in the modernisation of the manufacturing facilities at our Mt Wellington site has been substantial, as is our investment in our people," says Fung.

"We have state-of-the-art technology capable of processing and packaging 20,000 metric tonnes a year but without the best people in place you can't hope to be the best and we want to be

better than our peers."

He says they are serious about their business and providing high nutritional-value products, hence the investment.

"The domestic market is not big and it is saturated, which makes it hard for newcomers, but those that are committed will survive and continue.

"We want to serve the New Zealand market as much as we can."

The company is working on a variety of products including adult formula, infant formula, ice cream powder, yoghurt powder and cream powder – products that are easy to ship and have a long shelf life, which is important in the export business.

He says the New Zealand dairy industry has a lot to offer the Chinese market and there are still many opportunities and potential.

"New Zealand food products have a really good reputation in China and this is only growing."

"As more and more tourists visit, they see the fantastic environment and food resources that are available, and they take that message back to friends."

Overall, he says, New Zealand

Leon Fung says New Zealand dairy products have been positively presented in China.

and its dairy industry have been presented positively, which "goes a long way with consumers".

"The 100% Pure motto is well established in people's minds and as a result they know they can trust the products they are buying."

He says the key to a New Zealand-based business being successful in China, is having the right contacts, making the right judgment calls and producing high-quality products.

"The demand is there and growing really fast."

"People are consuming more dairy products as they are becoming more conscious about what they are eating and have more disposable income which allows them greater choice."

He is keen to help companies who have a strong China focus and need guidance or assistance to better understand the commercial landscape, but also says "it's important to note that we have a wider market focus than just China – Winston Nutritional will be an exporter to the world".

He grew up in the vast urban sprawl of a city near Beijing, and had always had an interest in

food technology. He graduated with a Bachelor of Food Engineering in 1991.

"Back then, the young people seemed to be keen to go overseas to study."

"After I finished my degree, like many young graduates I looked at opportunities to do my master's degree in the US, Canada, and Australia, but discovered that New Zealand was strong in dairying and food production."

Arriving in 1996, he attended Massey University and graduated with first class honours in dairy technology.

His first job in New Zealand was at a Northland dairy company as a plant operator before progressing to a technical officer at the New Zealand Dairy Board.

He returned to China to work for Tetra Pak as the business development manager and later took on the role of cheese and powder system manager.

"The dairy industry in China was growing really fast – especially in last 15 years. I gained a lot of experience in the industry."

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"We were building plants for UHT milk, yoghurt, and milk powder. When I first started in Tetra, the plants that were processing 100-200 tonnes liquid milk per day were seen as big factories, but within a short time, new factories were built for 1000 to 2000 tonnes milk intake a day."

In 2007, he was appointed the general manager for Anhydro in China, and also covered the Asian market.

While working in Shanghai, he completed a second master's degree in business administration at Fudan University.

In 2012, the general manager, William Zhao, and chairman, Likun Zhang, of Yashili NZ Dairy Company, invited him to join their project based in Pokeno, south of Auckland, so he returned to New Zealand bringing with him his wife Jenny and son Ethan, 12.

Winston Nutritional general manager Leon Fung has overseen a \$30 million upgrade to the plant which will produce products destined for China.

"Initially, I worked as a project adviser and later took on the role of deputy general manager."

"I am very happy to have had the opportunity to work on that project from the very beginning to commercial operation of the factory. It was a good project."

In 2016, he was recruited by Winston Nutritional.

Winston does not collect milk from farmers. Instead, it buys milk powder products from Fonterra and minor ingredients from companies such as DSM and Invita in New Zealand.

"Sourcing ingredients from reputable suppliers enable a consistent supply to the factory and we pay a premium for those ingredients."

"Our philosophy is to use only the best quality ingredients and technology to create the finest, healthiest nutritional products on the market."

"Our focus is on quality, teamwork and workplace culture. Culture and teamwork are incredibly important if you truly want to produce the highest

quality nutritional products in the world which we do."

Since taking over the factory, he has brought in experienced staff to cover all functions in quality, research and development, production and supply chain.

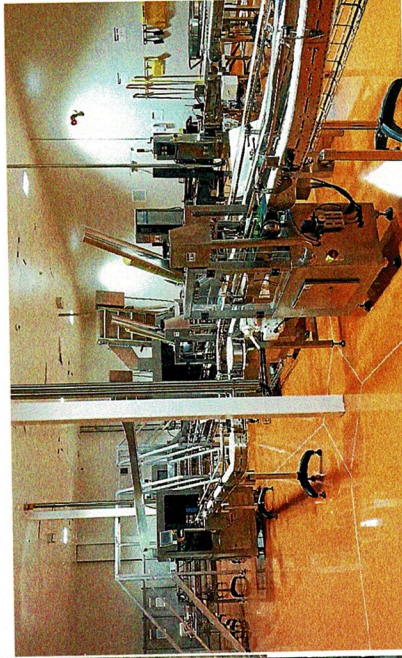
"Some of our staff previously worked at Fonterra and Danone."

"Product development and innovation will be a core function and will help drive our expansion plans."

Moving their products in China won't be an issue as the company has an existing brand, Hoeslandt, which has its headquarters in Hong Kong and is well-established in the China market.

In the meantime, he says there is still plenty of work to be done in both domestic and global markets and is proud to be a part of an industry that produces innovative New Zealand nutritional products for a global audience.

"I want Winston Nutritional to be at the forefront of our sector as it reaches out to the rest of the world with new products and new ways of doing business."



The Winston Nutritional plant in Auckland will operate 24 hours a day with a capacity of 20,000 metric tonnes a year and eventually employ 50 to 60 staff.



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