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Seaweed micro-encapsulations target sports nutrition and smoothie markets

By David Anderson , 13-Apr-2017



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A new micro-encapsulated seaweed ingredient will 'open up a whole new avenue' for Seaweed & Co as it targets smoothies and the sports nutrition market.

Research behind the micro-encapsulated seaweed ingredient suggests it has reduced aromas and flavours, and so could "open up a whole new avenue" to the specialist UK seaweed nutrition company, which is launching the ingredient and research supporting it at this year's VitaFoods.

Doctor Craig Rose, managing director of Seaweed & Co, told NutraIngredients he is hoping Seaweed & Co can tap into the European and global smoothie and sports nutrition market with the micro-encapsulated seaweed ingredient.

He said that Seaweed & Co were trialling the ingredient with a number of big players in the smoothie market, but wouldn't give specific details of who they were.

"It can be massively significant. It opens up a whole new avenue which was not available because of the challenges with existing product flavours," he told us.

Seaweed & Co has been selling its seaweed ingredient into the nutrition market on its virtues as a salt replacement, being flavour boosting and as a good source of iodine.

Research has shown its potential to help with weight and blood sugar management.

Reduced aromas and flavours

Compared to standard seaweed, the micro-encapsulated seaweed ingredient has reduced aromas and flavours.

"One of the challenges [with the existing seaweed ingredient] was that the flavours can work very well in more savoury products, or in capsules," explained doctor Rose.

"But when we are looking at perhaps sports nutrition, which is generally a sweeter flavour, or smoothies or functional foods that have those flavours, we were limiting ourselves in that we couldn't go into the markets because the flavour was a challenge."

"We developed this micro-encapsulated product, which is still plant based, which massively reduces the aroma so therefore protecting the product that it goes into from what can be more challenging savoury seaweed flavours."

"In addition, the micro-encapsulated material protects the key nutrients in the seaweed through the stomach for them to be released more in the small intestine where you want them to be released."

"There's whole market there for people who might be insufficient in iodine. And certainly the fact that you can talk about the health claims of energy yielding metabolism on pack for a very small inclusion of the seaweed," he told us.

Great promise

Research from Newcastle University has shown the seaweed's potential to help managing blood sugar levels.

This is because the polyphenols present inhibit the enzymes alpha-amylase and alpha-glucosidase, which are responsible for breaking down carbohydrates, and thus energy may be released more slowly.

Dr Matthew Wilcox, lead researcher at Newcastle University's Medical School said: *"This initial research holds great promise to build on the potential we have already seen from Seaweed & Co.'s seaweed supply.*

"Using our unique human gut model system, we can evaluate polyphenol release at any stage of the digestion process from salivary stage until the end of the small intestine, where the vast majority of absorption takes place.

"Our models are tested against human trials to give excellent correlation. Further work will be done to look at bioavailability using techniques developed by my team at Newcastle University"

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