

Project has potential to position Ontario agri-food industry as a leader: Volunteer

"This project has the potential to position Ontario's agri-food industry as a leader in the marketplace, with new functional food products that add value to our crops and bring greater returns to our producers," Coburn told COSC employees. "This project will reaffirm our position as a leader in research and technology..."

After a tour of the growing facilities led by COSC president Dennis Barker, Coburn told *The Intelligencer* the money "will help the company stay on the leading edge" by feeding a growing consumer market that demands new and nutritional foods.

"People are so conscious now of food safety and food quality," said Coburn. "They want nutritional food. This is a market that has tremendous potential and these people have identified that. This is untapped potential and we're glad to be a partner here."

COSC president Barker said his urban farming facility, where organic sprouts are grown in sterile high-tech rooms, will only grow larger thanks to the provincial investment and recent research conducted at COSC in-house labs on site.

The new drying machines will be built thanks to a major co-operative with partners, DeCloet Ltd., NutraSur Canada Inc., Scotlynn Investments Inc. and Langside Farms.

"Our primary business is fresh sprouts such as alfalfa sprouts, broccoli sprouts, red clover sprouts. But we met a group called DeCloet who do the drying and that's what this project is about," said Barker.

"We've also teamed up with NutraSur who has the research capabilities and Langside Farms to come up with a dry product that is the absolutely state-of-the-art," said Barker. "Our new prototype drier will be, we believe, bigger, better, more efficient."

With a solid business base in "flax

powder that is second to none, we'll be bringing on blueberries, cranberries, cherries that we will dry and powder with the same technology and then blend with our flax products and also sell as a blended berry product."

To create the new dried products, the company will subject sprouts and berry produce to a "cold-drying process where we dry at low temperatures over time where all of the nutrients are preserved. Our philosophy is, if it is good in fresh form, that's the way we want to keep it."

Unlike the 28-day shelf-life of fresh sprout products sold in grocery

stores, dried flax powders will enable the company to "open up to a global market" because powders have stability at room temperature of a year and can be used in baking and cooking.

The longer due dates will allow the company to expand to formulate three major dried products including flax supplements, flax flour and flax pet food.

The demand for flax, said Barker, is growing worldwide because of a snowballing recognition that flax contains Omega-3 fatty acids that encourage good health by benefiting the

brain, eyes and nervous system. Experts contend, said Barker, that supplementing Omega-3 is an ideal way to "close a dangerous nutrition gap in modern diets."

To complement the launch of the new drying machine and new COSC powdered flax products, the company is launching a major advertising campaign and has signed major deals with large retail grocery chains.

Barker said one of the first dried products under the brand name NutraSprout (NUTRABlue) is set to be launched across Canada in March of this year.