

Berries Hold Super Future for Westin

"Look, up on the shelf! It's purple – it's powerful – it's Superberries!"

Westin Foods is a major player in the olive and pre-cooked bacon business. But an extremely powerful berry has got the Omaha-headquartered specialty food company moving up, up and away into health and wellness.

Scott Carlson, President and CEO of Westin Foods, has great expectations for Superberries, their brand name for products made from aroniaberries. "We had not heard of the aroniaberry," Carlson said, "but we did some research and soon realized the health and wellness benefits of this purple berry. We got very excited by the berries' potential and feel that there is much room for growth.

So what's to know about aroniaberries? The deep purple berry, sometimes known as chokeberries, used to be common in North America and consumed by the native populations. The bushes eventually disappeared but showed up again in Eastern Europe where they were cultivated in the 1800's with great popularity.

The aroniaberry has proven to be a powerful antioxidant that may help assist the body's cells from the damaging effects of oxidation. Nebraska farmer

Kenny Sailors learned of the berry's health and wellness benefits in the mid '90's and began planting and maintaining bushes. He opened a small retail store in Omaha offering only aroniaberry products under the Superberries brand name.

Carlson said Sailors' business caught on and grew to a size where adding a partner would help him advance Superberries beyond Omaha. "Westin purchased the business in 2009 and has been expanding ever since," he said.

Westin Foods established the Superberries production center at its facilities in Fairbury, NE, for manufacturing, distribution and fulfillment of its freshly frozen berries, aronia concentrate and gummy chews. It has expanded the space twice in the last two years, "and we see more growth ahead," Carlson added.

As expected First National Bank was an important partner in this expansion. The company and the bank have been working together since the early 1970's when founder Dick Westin and First National's John Lauritzen shook

hands on Westin Foods first loan.

"The bank has grown with us as we've expanded and made investments throughout the U.S. and overseas," Carlson said. "Access to capital has been key at critical points in our history, and First National also provided us with full access to their team of professionals from top to bottom. We view First National as business partners and stakeholders in our family business."

Westin Foods is a privately held company, with sales exceeding \$200 million a year and more than 300 employees. Its primary manufacturing plants are in Fairbury, Nebraska, and in Harlan, Iowa, with small satellite offices around the country. It's very well known in the olive business with the Mario and Fragata brand of olives and olive oil through Mario Camacho Foods.

Retailers, restaurants and shoppers also know Westin Packaged Meats under the Brookfield Farms and Fairbury brands of pre-cooked bacon and real and imitation bacon bits. Those businesses continue to grow and thrive, but the entry into the health and wellness market has Carlson equally excited. "It's a

very interesting business – very fragmented and very competitive," he said. "There are a lot of other berries and health products in the market, but retailers know us as an established player whose products are safe and whose promises are backed up."

He said the company is establishing a national footprint in the natural foods channel, as well as selling Superberries online. The Superberries products are currently in more than 150 retail outlets across the country and will be a major player in natural food stores nationwide. In the Omaha area, the product is available at Hy-Vee, Bag 'N Save, No Name Nutrition and Tomato Tomato; other locations can be found on their website.

Carlson knows with an unfamiliar product, there's a good deal of retailer and consumer education ahead. "We're educating health and wellness advocates and influencers on the incredible benefits this powerful purple berry delivers," he said. "Consumers have become increasingly accountable for their own health, and Superberries delivers the added nutrition they're looking for."

For more information about the aroniaberry visit www.superberries.com



Scott Carlson
President and CEO
of Westin Foods



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