



QUALITY PRODUCT & SHARED VALUES RECIPE FOR SUCCESS



Craig Orr,
Aotearoa Fisheries
general manager

When the ruler of Dubai and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Rashid Al Maktoum, wanted top-quality protein for his visionary humanitarian aid initiative, New Zealand was the obvious choice.

As the Dubai-based project director Abdelouahab Soufane explains: "The most important thing for us was quality, and the first country known for quality food products is New Zealand."

The goal of the initiative, called Salma after a famous Emeriti nurse, is to deliver one million pouches of long-lasting halal protein meals to disaster-torn regions around the world.

There's no shortage of options for sourcing New Zealand meat, so how did a Palmerston North company, Prepared Foods Limited (PFL), come to play the pivotal role?

PFL has spent many years producing highly technical ration packs for military use in New Zealand and Australia. Via a joint venture company, they still assemble thousands of ration packs annually for the Australian Defence Force.

But it was a shared values base

that really made the difference for the Dubai ruler and his advisers. As an iwi-owned food company that invests profits for iwi and future generations, PFL (a division of Aotearoa Fisheries) was an obvious partner.

"We already produced high-quality ready-to-eat meals in pouches, but it was a coming together of values and culture that created the opportunity for us to supply our products into Dubai," says Craig Orr, Aotearoa Fisheries General Manager, Group Business Development.

"We have a deep-rooted love for our land, our oceans and our people. Kaitiakitanga, or guardianship, is the all-important value we hold dear to ensure the success of our future generations, and this value is understood and shared by the people of Dubai."

As a result the Government of Dubai, with New Zealand Prime Minister John Key present, last year signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with PFL to supply the pouches – the first such agreement that the Government has ever signed with a non-Islamic company.

The Salma pouches use technology first used by NASA astronauts. With multiple laminates of foil packaging, they create a 'shelf stable' product with a minimum two-year shelf life that can endure high temperatures and harsh conditions, including challenging

logistics and distribution demands.

The preservative-free meals are processed in PFL's state-of-the-art manufacturing plant in Palmerston North. The pouches are sealed before being x-rayed as part of rigorous quality control processes and are then put through a retort system (effectively pressure cooking the contents to stabilise them). It is this process that gives the pouches their long shelf life.

Last year alone, about 100,000 pouches were produced for Salma to distribute to people affected by the Nepal earthquake. Earlier production runs were also sent to Gaza, with the Dubai ruler's personal plane used to air-lift them from the NZ Air Force's Ohakea air base.

"Our move into consumer-focused branded products such as the pouches will continue as there is a rapidly growing global consumer demand for convenient, healthy and nutritious ready-to-eat meals," says Orr.

"The halal market is another area for possible future expansion. It is estimated that by 2019 the Muslim food market will be worth \$25.4 billion - 21% of the total global food market." ■

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