

Health and Performance Food International

Health and Performance Food International was founded in 2002 with the business idea to introduce the traditional Ethiopian cereal Teff to the western market. Teff, in contrary to our commonly known cereals, does not contain gluten, a specific protein, which people, who suffer from the celiac disease, cannot digest. But soon research confirmed, that Teff and other ancient grains like millet and sorghum varieties have many more advantages: They help our body to keep its vitality, reduce the production of fat and may even positively influence blood pressure.

Teff originates from Ethiopia and is a vital ingredient for the traditional nutrition in the country. Conventional products made out of Teff are pan-cakes (Injera) and tela – a local beer.

When the Netherlands based company Health and Performance Food International started to introduce Teff to the North American and European market, they felt that it should happen with the consent of the people of Ethiopia. For the company it was important that the people of Ethiopia, who have cultivated, conserved and refined this endemic cereal for centuries would benefit from its use in other parts of the world.

In 2004, Health & Performance Food International signed an agreement with the Ethiopian government. The agreement permits the Dutch company to introduce Teff to western nutrition, to sell and promote the grain Teff worldwide and to develop non-traditional Teff based food and beverage products. The agreement explicitly does not include access to traditional knowledge on conservation, cultivation and use.

According to the agreement the Government of Ethiopia ensures to give Health & Performance Food International exclusive access to its Teff varieties. Both parties agreed to exchange new research results on Teff. Wherever Health & Performance Food International promotes its products, it committed itself to also talk about the genetic origin of Teff.

Meanwhile Health & Performance Food International has invested 3 Million Euro and 4 years of work in research. It identified 3 varieties of Teff-seeds out of 375, that are best adapted to the European climate and soil. Together with Ethiopian scientists the Dutch company is breeding improved varieties. In parallel, food companies in many different European countries and the USA developed recipes for Teff-products, including breads and beer. By now the cultivation of the gluten-free cereal in Europe and the USA is profitable and the products made out of it, including products for top sportsmen, are not only sold in many European countries but also in the United States and Canada. The turnover of Health and Performance Food International has reached about 1 Million Euro last year.

Based on the agreement five percent of the net profitability of the company is put into a fund with which the Ethiopian government and Health & Performance Food International stimulate sustainable job-creation for Ethiopian farmer societies. In addition the African country receives an annual royalty of 30% of the net profit from sale of Teff basic seeds and 10 Euro for every hectare cultivated with Teff by the company.

The population will directly benefit from the collaboration through job creation, improved production technology and methodologies as well as improved Teff-varieties with higher yielding. But also the Ethiopian Institute of Biodiversity Conservation has advantages from the cooperation, as it enhances its technical capacity with regard to access and benefit sharing and facilitates improved access to ABS information and experiences. Health & Performance Food International also supports the Ethiopian university through funding research activities on Teff.