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Neptune-Degussa deal to develop phospholipids, adapt krill oil

By Jess Halliday , 12-Dec-2005

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Neptune Technologies and Bioresources has entered into an alliance with Germany's Degussa over two projects that will facilitate the use of its krill oil and potent derivatives in nutraceuticals and foods.

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The alliance consists of two projects that will run concurrently. One involves making improvements to Neptune Krill Oil (NKO) to make it suitable for functional foods, and the other to extract, purify and isolate the phospholipids from the mass at the heart of NKO.

Tina Sampalis, VP R&D and business development, explained to NutraIngredients-USA.com that there are six phospholipids in the mass, but the companies are mainly interested in four of them: PhosphatidylSerine, which has been researched for its neurodegeneration protective properties; PhosphatidylCholin, which has shown promise in cognition and raising HDL ('good') cholesterol; and PhosphatidylEhtanolamine and PhosphatidylInositol, both of which offer general benefits.

"We are entering the market we have always aimed for: cognitive function," said Sampalis.

According to Neptune, these are the only known phospholipid carriers of EPA and DHA omega-3 and antioxidants. Because of their high astaxanthin (antioxidant) content, they are more stable than other EPA/DHA carriers - a desirable quality since omega-3 fatty acids are particularly susceptible to oxidation.

It is expected that this project will open the way for Neptune and Degussa to take phospholipids into the nutraceutical, cosmeceutical and nutrigenomic medical food markets. At a later stage they hope to develop even higher purity phospholipids for biopharmaceutical products.

As for the NKO adaptation, Sampalis said that Degussa will use its technology to remove the seafood taste and smell of the oil, and therefore make it suitable for use in food products. While she was not able to give details of the technology Degussa will use to achieve this, she was clear that it does not involve microencapsulation, a method used by a number of ingredients companies to achieve similar results for other omega-3 containing oils. Degussa is renowned for its expertise in supercritical CO2 extraction.

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The agreement contains an exclusivity clause governing the activities of both companies - they have agreed not to work with other parties to develop similar ingredients. While Neptune will retain its intellectual property on the products and Degussa will retain its on the technology, both companies will distribute the end result.

Neptune has recently received approval of its logo and trademark by the European Registration Office, a crucial step towards rolling out NKO to Europe, where Sampalis believes it will prove popular in functional foods, and in particular in infant formula.

This effectively makes NKO available to 860 million new consumers. At present it is operating at 45 percent capacity, producing 60,000 kg of NKO per year. But by the end of 2006 anticipates reaching full capacity, after which point a new production plant will be required.

The new plant will be located on the west coast of the United States, where the majority of Neptune's customers are based. Moreover, since the fish from which the oil is sourced come from the Antarctic Ocean, a move to that side of the American land mass will cut transportation costs considerably.

Sampalis said it is anticipated that all production of NKO will be moved to the US facility once it is operational, but the company does not plan to dispose of its Quebec base. Rather, this will be turned over to the phospholipids.

A European facility is also in the company's plans, but this will follow the west coast move. The country has not yet been decided on.

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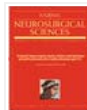
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