

Feature No. 34: BK Environmental Innovations



Sales of plastic cutlery grow at a rate of 20-30 percent per year, generating significant non-biodegradable waste and contributing to overflowing landfills. During the hour-long bus rides to and from their previous office job, entrepreneurs Narayana Peesapaty and Rama Devi Rayapudi devised a solution that provides the same convenience of disposable forks, spoons, and knives without the waste: edible cutlery.

Although the concept of edible utensils is not a new one, BK Environmental Innovations has been among the first to turn the concept into a reality by baking a mix of Sorghum flour, known in India as Jowar. Jowar has traditionally been an important source of nutrients such as folic acid and fiber, yet the domestic consumption of this crop has recently decreased and been replaced by starch-laden Rice. BK is helping to revitalize Jowar as consumers, especially those with diabetes, have also used the cutlery as a nutritious snack. It is because of this that BK's tagline is, "Hygienic, healthy, and environmentally-friendly!"

As BK scales up production, they hope to create additional social benefits by partnering with local Jowar farmers who have been unable to find a market for this remarkable heat and drought tolerant crop. Narayana and Rama hope that promoting Jowar will generate revenue for farmers while also providing a viable substitute for water-depleting rice cultivation.

BK offers spoons in three flavors and expects to expand their production to edible sandwich wrappers and edible chopsticks. Large-scale domestic buyers, such as the ITC WelcomGroup hotels, have already shown initial interest and BK Environmental Innovations hopes to eventually enter the international market. Requests from international sellers have come from various countries including Singapore, New Zealand, and Canada. With Japan and China's growing demand for chopsticks and decreasing availability of resources, an environmental movement has grown to search for better options. Narayana expects the edible chopstick to be a popular alternative to disposable chopsticks.



BK Environmental Innovations has already doubled its profits in the past two years and the founders foresee larger revenue growth in the future. As Narayana Peesapaty says, "Something big is cooking."

For more information about BK Environmental Innovations, visit www.new-ventures.org.

Written by Rajya Karipineni, World Resources Institute ©2007 – The Rising Ventures Series features articles, announcements and profiles of investors and entrepreneurs related to the theme of innovative small and medium businesses (SMEs) in emerging markets that deliver social and/or environmental benefits. These business models have been identified through the New Ventures (www.new-ventures.org) and Development through Enterprise (www.nextbillion.net) projects. To view other Features in the Series, visit <http://www.new-ventures.org/risingventures>.