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NEWS

Banjo Bear joins carob creations



The Carob Kitchen of Port Elliot has launched Australia's first premium, Carob Milk Bar range to mainstream distribution.

The organically grown range has no added sugar and is caffeine, theobromine and gluten free. It has no palm kernel oil.

Sophie Richards manages sales and marketing for the family enterprise. Packaging for the 80g blocks is hand drawn interpretations of the carob leaf and bean. Bars come in two varieties: Milk and Almond. The branding repeats in counter top dispensers for cafes, gourmet supermarkets and health food shops.

Mascot Banjo, The Carob Bear, was a 15g individually wrapped 'no added sugar' treat for children, but adults like it too.

The new brand launch comes just a year after the inaugural Carob Kitchen pure Carob range, which includes Carob Syrup, Carob Kibble Nibbles and roasted Carob Powder.

"My parents (David and Carol Solomon) planted the carob orchard 17 years ago after choosing the site by the sea, advised by Andrew Gebhardt my mother's brother in law," Sophie says.

"They were going to grow the beans and sell them to the Gebhardt's business. Sadly, that business was sold and my parents had 3500 trees already planted. It took 15 years for the trees to bear a crop substantial enough to process.

They decided to launch The Carob Kitchen, Australia in 2011. Initially carob seed exported at \$25/kg but as the price fell to \$5/kg the notion of adding value gained appeal.

"We manufacture our products on three separate premises, as all three products require completely different processes. Transport is a huge cost to our business," Sophie says.

Syrup is made at Mildura Fruit Juices. Powder is roasted and milled at Boobarowie in the Mid North. Nibbles are carob beans with the seed removed and chopped into small pieces - they have sold out. The New Carob Milk Bar range is made interstate because the carob 'chocolate' must be made from scratch.

"We tried our hardest to keep our brand manufacturing in SA but there are only two chocolate manufacturers who make it from scratch - Haigh's, who do not contract make, and another producer who use only palm kernel oil when making confectionery," Sophie says.

Distribution began after a small trade show in NSW found national distributors eager for the product.

"We decided to launch in SA first, as we did not want to sell out. At the end of the day our product relies on agriculture and the growing and drying of our carob beans, which in turn relies on the seasonal elements. After a long, wet winter we are trying to dry our beans for processing.

"We tasted (the new range) at the Royal Adelaide Show in the IGA Pavilion (Taste SA). We will continue our fortnightly stand at the Willunga and Wayville Farmers market, where our team of family members taste, talk and sell carob.

"Our distributors in SA have just confirmed ranging of these products in Drakes Foodland, Romeos Foodland and IGA and the Chapleys group of Foodlands. Within the month you should see this product roll out in health food stores across the state too.

"Come October 2012, we will launch nationally in Australia. To support this we intend to taste and sell at the Brisbane Good Food and Wine Show in Brisbane. With close monitoring of sales and supply we have no doubt this carob has export potential."



Sophie Richards