



Nutrient Survival CEO Eric Christianson shows an essential instrument to processing the freeze-dried food.
PHOTOS BY EVAN HADDAD FOR RGJ

‘Feed your freedom’

Reno-based survival food company finding success in fast-growing industry

Evan Haddad Reno Gazette Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

At a sprawling warehouse in northwest Reno, a new company is trying to plot the future of survival food.

Nutrient Survival is vying for a slice of the fast-growing survival food industry, which has exploded in recent years in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other disasters. The company specializes in nutrient-dense survival food that is engineered to pack more protein, vitamins and other nutrients than would naturally occur.

The company was founded two years ago by businessman Peter Castleman, who made his fortune on Wall Street and, among other ventures, served as chairman at the nutrition company Herbalife before retiring to the West. The day-to-day operations are led by CEO Eric Christianson, a West Point graduate and Army ranger who served in executive roles at big food brands such as Perdue Farms and the Campbell Soup Company.

“It was the heart of the pandemic. People were in need of food,” Christianson said of the company’s be-



The food is cooked before being freeze dried.

ginnings. “Back then, it was just wear a mask and avoid people. So what can you do for yourself? Take action, eat great food, naturally keep yourself strong and naturally give yourself the ability to perform at your optimal rate.”

The company is headquartered inside a 100,000 square-foot warehouse near Mayberry Park in northwestern Reno. The food is prepped and cooked by hand before undergoing an industrial scale freeze-

See FOOD, Page 2D

Food

Continued from Page 1D

drying process inside an apparatus that looks like a small submarine. The process, which removes virtually all of the water from the food while locking in the nutrients, allows the finished product to last two decades or more on the shelf.

Modern survival food has evolved far beyond the freeze-dried stuff of early astronauts. Some of Nutrient Survival's meals include mac n' cheese, scrambled eggs, lasagna, shakes and vitamin instant coffee. Most of the meals and bev-

erages need only a bit of water, although they can be modified or embellished as desired. The company's products are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration rather than the United States Department of Agriculture because the protein comes from plants, not animals.

Nutrient Survival is a direct-to-consumer business, selling its food exclusively through the company website. Depending on the season, Nutrient Survival generates between \$500,000 and \$1 million in sales with an average order size of \$250, Christianson said.

According to a 2019 report by Allied Market Research, the global emergency food market is projected to reach \$6 bil-

lion by 2025, though Christianson acknowledges the difficulty in pinning down precise growth projections for such a broad, emerging industry.

Since 2013, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has conducted an annual survey to assess how well prepared Americans are for disasters. According to the 2021 report, the peak of "self-assessed preparedness" occurred in 2019 with roughly 60% of Americans describing themselves as ready for a disaster.

Many survival food brands market their goods in the conservative media sphere, running advertisements during commercial breaks of news organiza-

tions such as Fox News and Newsmax. A "prepper" describes a person who prepares for a likely future disaster, and the word has in recent years become associated with fear mongering, fringe lifestyles or conspiracy theories.

Christianson thinks this is an undeserved stigma, one he hopes the brand will conquer by appealing to campers, fitness enthusiasts and other active lifestyles. One of the company slogans is "feed your freedom."

"For us, it's not about fear. It's about being smart," he said.

Follow @HaddadEvan for timely, relevant and compelling reporting on food, drinks and city life in Reno.