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Kiwi college investigates 'game-changing' processing technology

By RJ Whitehead, 13-Oct-2016
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New Zealand researchers are investigating whether an innovation centre based on a novel food processing technology could "transform" the country's food industry.



Massey University will host representatives from 915 Labs, which has commercialised the product, at networking event for local food companies to attend.

The American company holds the license for Microwave Assisted Thermal Sterilisation (MATS) and Microwave Assisted Pasturisation (MAPS) technologies.

MATS uses microwaves to speed up the heating process for packaged foods, essentially combining a continuous retort with a microwave. Though similar, MAPS operates at lower temperatures and with shorter heating times required for pasteurisation. It heats packaged foods and beverages simultaneously with hot water and microwave energy for up to 10 minutes.

The technology means products look and taste fresher, retain more sensitive nutritional components and have an extended shelf life, said Abby Thompson, director of Massey's Riddet Innovation.

"It is a real game changer," Dr Thompson added.

It was primarily developed for human ready-meals, but there has also been much interest in premium pet foods.

915 Labs manufactures MATS systems and will begin producing one that is MAPS-only in 2017. Massey University, meanwhile, is looking to establish an innovation centre for this technology, based at the

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FoodPilot in Palmerston North.

This would be supported by a dedicated team providing food technology, process engineering and regulatory expertise, who would work on validation projects on behalf of international food companies.

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"We look forward to meeting with members of the New Zealand food industry and experts from Massey University to talk about the future of packaged food and the impact of microwave processing on the quality and nutrition of ready-to-eat and shelf-stable products," said Michael Locatis, chief executive of 915 Labs.

Phil McGrath, chief executive of Food Locomotive said he was excited by the possible venture. *"MATS is ground-breaking technology that enables us to create true clean-label products with improved nutrition, texture and flavour for our customers."*

Craig Nash, chair of the Massey's FoodHQ commercialisation stream, is working with Massey to secure the technology.

"Palmerston North is the home of food and beverage innovation in New Zealand. By securing MATS technology we will provide both New Zealand and Manawatu food companies with an edge and help grow our economy."

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