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# N.S.-based Foxmill expanding range of cold-pressed organic seed oils

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PADDY'S HEAD, N.S. - Peter Fuchs is trying to close the circle - a life respectful of all that nature provides - wasting nothing, wanting nothing.

From the manner in which he runs Foxmill, his cold-pressed organic oil business, fuels his two huge Mercedes cars, and heats his home in a tranquil Nova Scotia seaside village, it appears he's well on his way.

A native of Germany, Fuchs grew up in Bavarian farm country where he trained as an engineer working in biofuels and high-energy power systems before moving to Canada permanently a few years ago following some serious health issues.

Fuchs runs his cars and the state-of-the-art generators that power his mill on canola oil, extruding the shells of whatever seed he's processing into pellets that are later burned in a woodstove.

"I like to do those things nobody else can or wants to do," he says as he leans back in a chair, his round face framed by an elaborate handlebar moustache.

"I started making my own fuel in the mid-'90s. In 1994 we produced our own cold-pressed oil and we used it in our own trucks and service cars of our company."

He could almost light up a town himself with the personal energy he puts out as he sits in the office of his Paddy's Head mill and discusses ambitious plans for the future of Foxmill, including being 100 per cent organic within a couple of years.

His move to Nova Scotia in 2003 with his partner Andrea Fischer came with major lifestyle changes. After dropping 70 pounds and radically changing his eating habits, Fuchs says he got to thinking about other applications for his oils.

"There is so much potential for not only energy but healthy edible, pharmaceutical and cosmetic products as well," said Fuchs.

The problem is finding local organic seed such as flax, canola and sunflower that he can process, but all that is beginning to change.

Through a small network of German ex-pats, he slowly began to make contact with a few

growers interested in where he was headed.

"The hard thing was to find guys who were honourable and liked what we wanted to do," says Fuchs, who does all of his deals with just a handshake.

"I told them I had a way for them to make an extra buck out of the hard work they're already putting into their land."

He approached the owners of Jost Wineries in northern Nova Scotia who now give him grape seed that ordinarily would have been thrown away and left to rot after wine pressing.

"I just called them to ask what they did with their leftovers. I told them they could save a bit of money on labour not having to spread it out on their vineyards."

Fuchs has also figured out how to extract a powerful antioxidant called OPC, which is used in vitamin supplements, from the kernels of the grape seeds.

"It's in a thin layer just like a membrane on the kernel that preserves the seed from mould but it has to be extracted within 48 hours or it starts to ferment," he says.

One of the organic growers Fuchs was able to hook up with, Andrew Kernovan, has 240 hectares of arable land in the Parrsboro, N.S., area.

Kernovan, who holds a PhD in philosophy and lectures in environmental ethics on a part-time basis at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College, says Fuchs is onto something.

"The potential for him to grow his business and organic farming in the area is huge," says Kernovan.

He supplies Fuchs with flax and canola seed and has about half a hectare of special oil seed pumpkins under cultivation.

"The biggest challenge he faces is developing a market for much of his product."

Because of its isolation, Nova Scotia is ideally suited for growing organic crops, says Kernovan.

"Seed crops like flax or canola develop through wind-borne pollination, which is a problem if genetically modified crops are nearby," he says.

Fuchs is fanatical about avoiding any kind of cross contamination, carefully storing organic seeds and conventional seeds in separate areas and insisting that visitors to his mill spray their hands with a disinfectant.

One of his many side projects, besides developing flax powder supplements and making sea salt, is milling a luscious grey-green intensely flavoured pumpkin seed oil.

The seeds for the pumpkins, which contain seeds without shells, came from Austria and are being test grown at an organic centre at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College as well as on Kernovan's farm.

Fuchs ran an experimental batch of oil to check yield and flavour. Both, it turns out, were good. However, he says it troubled him to see all the pulp from the pumpkins he used go to waste.

Not any more, though. He's considering a different type of fuel.

"I hate to see waste so I thought about this and now I'm going to make pumpkin schnapps."

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