

Epap for Africa

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An instant, highly-fortified, maize-based product has been developed to address Africa's food and nutrition problems. Epap is made from finely-milled, pre-cooked full-fat maize (that is, unrefined or "yellow" maize), enriched with minerals, vitamins and soya for protein. A meal is prepared by simply adding clean cold or warm water. Milk, maas or yoghurt can be used instead of water.

The product is marketed mainly through job creation initiatives, NGOs, churches and private agents. Some individually-owned shops such as spazas and rural grocers also sell Epap.

The price to consumers is about R10 per 500g packet containing 10 meal portions. While this is high compared with super maize meal, Epap's nutrient value makes the difference. The manufacturer says Epap is far more nutritionally-dense than normal maize.

The premix is supplied by Cape Town-based company INS which specialises in food fortification.

Says Gary Klugman, a director of INS: "The nutrient component has been well researched to address malnutrition. It is a unique formula providing an optimal dosage of bio-available minerals and vitamins. It is far superior to the fortification mix prescribed by government in the staples fortification programme which will become mandatory in October. Improvement in a consumer's condition is evident after only two weeks of eating Epap."

Epap was developed by Econocom, which also manufactures the product. It is distributed by Africafoods.

Africafoods says consumption of Epap has grown strongly in the past two years. Thus consumer resistance to yellow maize, which is widespread in Africa, is apparently not affecting Epap. The fact that the product does not look unrefined, and is flavoured, may play a role in this regard.

Says Riaan Janeke, managing director of Africafoods: "We only use full-fat maize and soya. These raw material are not refined at all, thus retaining natural goodness and increasing the nutritional density. The entire manufacturing process is aimed at increasing the nutritional density of the end product."

While targeted at feeding schemes, Epap is suitable for anyone who wants to stay healthy or is in need of vitamins and minerals. Inroads are being made into the sports market, says Janeke.

Epap comes in three flavours: vanilla, banana and strawberry. It is available in most southern and east African countries, including Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya and the Congo (DRC).

Janeke: Tel +27-11-476 3591; riaan@africafoods.co.za

INS: Tel +27-21-910 2780

Click below to email supplier

riaan@africafoods.co.za