

Berry Springs' spirulina health farm - Australian made

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Photo: TAUU Australia Spirulina plant staff Gary Huang, Director Bel Huang, Shorty Ainsworth and Christopher Blow.

A Spirulina plant in Berry Springs, the only spirulina-growing facility in Australia, has complained that imported product is being characterised as Australian-made.

Tauu Australia Director Bel Huang says the company only sells the health food to export markets, as imported spirulina is too

Mr Huang said the price for spirulina is "ridiculously low".

Our manufacturing costs are higher than the retail price," he said.

"Our running costs are four to five times : that of (spirulina manu-

facturers in) China, Thailand or India."

Mr Huang alleges that imported dried spirulina is only packed or pressed into tablet form in Australia, yet it is claimed to be made in Australia.

A spokesman for the Australian Competition and Consumer Council (ACCC) confirmed that the matter was being investigated.

The spokesman said when misrepresentation of the Australian origin of a product was alleged, there were two tests the product would have to satisfy.

Under section 53 of the Trade Practices Act, at least half the production and manufacturing cost of the product has to be incurred in Australia, and there has to be a "substantial transformation of materials" in manufacture, spokesman said.

It is unclear whether packing and packaging of a product is considered a substantial transformation, although the spokesman acknowledged the cost of production would probably include "bringing the goods to a saleable

"It's a piece of legisla-

very broadly," he conceded.

However, the \$5 million Berry Springs plant seems to be doing very well with high-end markets overseas, with a turnover estimated at \$1.5 million.

The operation produces 50 to 60 tonnes of the dried algae a year.

The automated plant, which consists of 96 ponds growing the culture, filtration sinks and a \$2 million dehydration tower, is the company's own design.

Integral to this was an innovative method to gently agitate the culture using pumps. Agitation is necessary for the survival of Spirulina, which only thrives in salty, alkaline conditions - if the water is too still, the organism rises to the surface of the water and is killed by an overdose of sunlight.

The design, which received an Australian patthe location.

Mr Huang says it took two years before the various approvals were given - the plant has the only licence to import tive Spirulina culture in Australia, and the startup culture itself spent a year in quarantine.

anticipating seiling to markets closer to none in Maiaysia and Indoice sia next year.

The project received an AusIndustry grana to lissist with design and has valuable tectioncal assistfrom aquaculture section or the Department of Business, Industries and Resource Development.

According to Mr. Huang, Spirulina has been farmed comme:cially for about thirty veurs, and noted that in other markets such as Europe, the US and Japan, consumers were happy to pay an "extradollar for better health"

Spirulina is an edible cyanobacteria (the common name of this class or organism, blue-green algae', dates back to times it was thought to be ai-

It has been eaten for centuries in Africa and South America

Mr Huang says there was only two locations in the country that he would consider as viable for growing the nutritious algae, being Durwin's rural area and Cairns.

Mr Huang opted for Berry Springs for the quality of the water which he said is essentia. tor production, the core tinuous sunshine in the Dry, and the lack of pollution from industrialisation Christopher

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years to fine-tune pro-

duction before the plant

produced its first

Spirulina for market in

2001. Production has

quadrupled since then,

although not without

The current state of

the Australian dollar is

good for importers, but

not for exporters, says

Mr Huang, and the recall

of Pan Pharmaceuticals

products was disastrous

for the image of Austral-

ian health food exports.

company," he said. "Be-

fore, consumers trusted

us and Australian prod-

the reputation of Aus-

tralian health food."

"We've got to rebuild

The company exports

to Taiwan, New Zealand

and Singapore, and is

"It nearly killed our

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