

# Low-GI go: Holista Colltech primed for Asia expansion with healthy bread and noodle innovation

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**Malaysia-based Holista Colltech says it is set for significant Asian sales growth with its low-GI formulas for bread and noodles, on the back of securing its first major deal in North America.**

In an exclusive interview with FoodNavigator-Asia, the firm’s founder and CEO Dr Rajen Manicka said the biotech and ingredients company recently shipped the first batch of its proprietary low-GI GILITE product to Wing’s Food in Toronto, Canada, and is on course for sales of up to US\$60m before the end of 2018.

The transaction was completed by Holista Colltech’s US subsidiary, HolistaFoods USA, helmed by celebrity chef and CEO, Nadja Piatka.

The shipment to Wing's was from Malaysia, where the company's main production site currently is located, but all future batches will be from India or directly produced in Canada.

This would mean the ingredients — okra, lentils and fenugreek from India, and barley from Canada — would be locally sourced and sent to a Canadian facility to be blended, according to halal and kosher standards.

This would make production more efficient in terms of logistics, cost and time.

The low-GI noodles developed by Holista, and supported by Diabetes Canada, have a GI reading of 38 — well below the usual 60-65 for noodles.

*"We're halving the outcome so I think we're going to make a significant impact on health,"* said Dr Rajen.

An 85g serving of the low-GI noodles contains 11g of protein and 3g of fibre. It is also low in sodium and cholesterol.

Neal Lee, CEO of Wing's Food Products, said his company sees *"big possibilities"* for the low-GI noodles in North America.

*"Interestingly, we are now registering strong interest in China for products made here in Canada,"* he added.

Dr Rajen confirmed that they have had "serious inquiries" about the low-GI noodles from Australia and Canada. There have also requests in China to manufacture the low-GI noodles locally.

He said that this would only be possible for significant volumes of orders.

## **Asia's fight against diabetes**

Despite the first deal being in North America, Dr Rajen said he was expecting major growth to come from Asia.

Holista Colltech has also successfully tested low-GI formulas for bread, muffins and cookies. The company is now testing for pancakes, and about to start on a low-GI pizza.

For South East Asians, the firm is working on a low-GI roti canai / prata.

In terms of bread, he said the company is working with five manufacturers around the globe, including one in Singapore.

*"By June we would sign with one or two large bread players in the market," he said.*

He pointed out, among the top 10 obese countries in the world, China is number two and India is number three, while Indonesia is number 10. He said these countries alone make up about 3.2 billion people, representing half the world's population.

*"We are looking at JV partners in India and China, and potential partners in Indonesia," said Dr Rajen.*

He also said the company is potentially looking to work in Singapore, due to the nation's expertise in diabetic research, as well as strong government support for healthy eating, good regulatory framework, increased opportunities for innovation and finance facilities.

He further said it has been tested that Asians exhibit different reactions and speeds of reaction to blood sugar as compared to Caucasians.

*"Asian companies should innovate more for Asians and more Western companies should set up R&D centres here to innovate for Asia," he said.*

*"The development must happen close to home. Right now, the model is that Western brands do all their research there, then 'by the way' ship some to Asia. The axis should shift more strongly to this part of the world."*

## **Future of the fight**

Dr Rajen further highlighted the enormity of the issue. He said that one in five people in China are diabetic, while data in the Journal of the American Medical Association put about 50.1% of adult Chinese as pre-diabetic.

Taken in context, if nothing is done, within a few years more than half the population of China will be diabetic.

He said that some of the biggest challenges in the fight against diabetes include the fact that the low-GI concept is still not well understood by most people and that it's hard to convince people to pay more.

He said, in this regard, governments have a paternal role. Again, he cited Singapore as *"having done more than its fair share"* in terms of identifying diabetes as a concern, quantifying the cost of diabetes to the population, and 'rattling' manufacturers to get them out of their comfort zones to look at the problem and at what they could do.

Moreover, he feels that regulations such as a sugar tax would help, as would government grants, incentives or tax breaks, especially to manufacturers or retail companies to invest in low-GI products.

*“Ultimately, the most important person is the consumer. Has to make an informed choice. He has to make some sacrifice, including paying a bit more,”* he said.