



BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Natural Evolution – global opportunity not wasted on innovative farming couple

Customer Story

Perfectly good ‘waste’ bananas turned into healthy food source by world-first technology

Two cyclones just five years apart could not break the farming spirit of the Watkins’ family in North Queensland.

Instead, nature’s fury was the catalyst for the birth of green banana flour and a world-first processing facility; not to mention enormous global opportunities awaiting this can-do couple.

Rob Watkins is a second generation lady finger banana farmer. The devastation of Cyclones Larry and Yasi, in 2006 and 2011, left Rob and wife Krista questioning if their hard work was worth it.

At the same time they had been frustrated by the huge waste of perfectly good bananas that don’t meet supermarket size and appearance specifications.

Rob was Australia’s 2010 Young Farmer of the Year for inventing the ‘banana blanket’ – a fully recyclable cover for the bananas in transport.

He also made other banana harvesting machinery, before the entrepreneurial Rob turned his attention to the fruit.

He just knew there had to be more they could do with their produce.

“More than 100,000 tonnes of Australian bananas are wasted every year. Supermarket guidelines mean that each week 500 tonnes of bananas are thrown out because they are too big, too straight, have too much of a bend or have skin blemishes.”

ROB WATKINS, OWNER, NATURAL EVOLUTION



The Watkins produce market lady finger bananas and their value-add products are world class.

“Fast forward to now and we have curbed the terrible waste of perfectly good bananas and created a marvellous food source in the process, and made some of the most ground-breaking discoveries about the health benefits of green bananas.”

Rob’s answer to value-adding came in late summer 2010 when he accidentally drove over a bunch of bananas that had been left in the sun.

The puff of powder that came with the impact made Rob wonder if there was a flour product in the flesh of bananas.

The answer was yes and now the Watkins’ Natural Evolution company (previously trading as Mt Uncle’s Banana Flour) is commercially producing a range of green banana products.

They produce 300 tonnes a year of their gluten free flour for Japan and also sell product to Europe, the United Kingdom, South Korea and Singapore.

Almost \$1 million in Australian Government commercialisation funding helped Natural Evolution establish its purpose-built facility at the Watkins’ Walkamin farm, on the Atherton Tablelands.

It is the world’s first and only pharmaceutical grade banana processing factory, and from where Rob designed their innovative NutroLock technology.

NutroLock is the method in which Natural Evolution produce green banana flour, which is one of the highest resistant starch food sources in the world.

NutroLock is energy efficient and has the capability to take a green banana to powder in under 10 minutes, with minimal labour and a minimum output of one tonne per eight hour shift with two people.

The technology has been scientifically tested to lock in 20-50 times more nutrition compared with other standard food processing techniques.

Africa, Asia and Pacific regions have expressed interest in buying a NutroLock technology licence, and the potential of the patent-protected NutroLock is very broad.

NutroLock has been successful in preserving many other fruits and vegetables, including sweet potatoes, green papaya, mushrooms, apples, cassava and berries.

“We are currently receiving interest to form partnerships in other countries. Our proven factory design and equipment can be installed anywhere and deliver superior quality and reliability for export markets. We invite the world to get involved in a healthier, happier future with our incredible technology.”

ROB WATKINS, OWNER, NATURAL EVOLUTION

Natural Evolution has just won gold in the food and beverage category at the internationally acclaimed Edison Awards, for its world-first technology.

Natural Evolution's determination to find non-traditional channels to use and sell their produce meant they were a perfect fit with the Australian Government's Entrepreneurs' Programme.

Natural Evolution accessed the Entrepreneurs' Programme's Business Management, Accelerating Commercialisation and Innovation Connections elements.

A Business Evaluation focused on marketing and branding and channels to market, while Growth Services assistance has helped Natural Evolution to identify specific high growth opportunities.



Business Adviser Andrea Jackson is all smiles as Krista Watkins shows off the banana flour facility.

Entrepreneurs' Programme

The Entrepreneurs' Programme is an Australian Government initiative to improve business competitiveness and productivity.

The Business Management element provides experienced Business Advisers and Facilitators to review business operations including business direction, strategy, growth opportunities and supply chain.

[Growth Services](#) provides access to Advisers who assist businesses to develop strategies and execute processes to grow. The Advisers introduce new thinking, drive innovation and provide guidance and mentoring including access to external expertise, networks and other assistance to deliver transformative growth.

The [Accelerating Commercialisation](#) element helps small and medium businesses, entrepreneurs and researchers to commercialise novel products, processes and services.

[Innovation Connections](#) is a facilitation service that provides expert advice and solutions on knowledge-related issues, and a brokering service to connect businesses with knowledge providers and research organisations. This may include access to matched funding grants to assist with direct access to research capability to work on identified research projects.

Check your eligibility by visiting the [Entrepreneurs' Programme](#) or call **13 28 46**.

Innovation Connections' facilitation advice enabled Natural Evolution to further investigate the nutritional properties of their bananas.

Besides their green banana flour and resistant starch supplement, Natural Evolution also use the skins of 'waste' bananas to produce a healing ointment, moisturiser, soap bar and a beauty mist.

NutroLock technology has also enabled smoothie mixes to be produced and given way to a green banana equine and animal supplement.

View [Natural Evolution](#) products.