# Looking for a a bio-equivalent to palm oil? Meet Clean Food Group

As part of our quickfire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Alex Neves, cofounder and CEO of Clean Food Group about sustainable alternatives to food ingredients, collaborating with the University of Bath and applying technology and innovation to help make food systems healthier and more sustainable.

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I have been in the food industry since 2009, when I co-founded a healthy convenience food business Scratch Meals Ltd, with a friend of mine Phil Pinnell – the business is still going strong and growing rapidly.

The experience of starting a food market stall in London and helping to grow the business to a large scale supplying multi-national retailers and food service businesses gave me an invaluable insight into the food industry and how our global food systems work.

How the global food industry feeds our population of 7.8 billion, producing and moving food all around the world daily, is genuinely an incredible feat of human ingenuity and progress. But much of it comes at a huge cost to our environment and to our health.

In 2018 I joined the founding team of a medical cannabis business EMMAC Life Sciences where I was responsible for the wellness and consumer goods

division. This experience gave me an insight into how large conventional industries could be challenged by technology and innovation and new ways of doing things that are kinder to our planet and to our health.

Clean Food Group was born out of these two experiences and insights – applying technology and innovation to help make our food systems healthier and more sustainable.

# Tell me about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

*Clean Food Group* was founded in 2021 to make healthier, more sustainable alternatives to food ingredients that are causing irrevocable damage to our planet and our health, without compromising on taste or performance.

Our hero product is our Clean Palm Oil, a bio-equivalent to palm oil in terms of its nutritional and fatty acid makeup. As it performs in the same way palm oil does, following market authorisation, our palm oil alternative will be able to be used in all product applications where palm oil is currently used. Earlier this year the company acquired relevant intellectual property from the University of Bath where the technology has been developed over the last eight years by Professor Chris Chuck and his team.

We've signed a two-year collaboration agreement with the University to scale the technology and bring its palm oil alternative to multiple markets. We will also be investing in the development of a large-scale pilot plant which will allow us to enter into meaningful collaborations with commercial partners and demonstrate our palm oil alternative within finished products. We have already received significant market interest and are speaking with major retail partners.

# How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

We founded the company last year. Since then we have built a team of incredibly talented and experienced technical advisors, including Prof Chris Chuck (University of Bath) and Prof Darren Nesbeth (UCL) and completed the acquisition of our foundational technology, developed by Prof Chris Chuck, a sustainable alternative to palm oil.

We have also completed our seed and pre-seed funding, raising over £2M in total and have agreed on a collaboration with the University of Bath to scale our palm oil technology. The collaboration includes the funding of a dedicated Clean Food Group laboratory with a growing team of scientists and a Clean Food Group pilot plant at the University.

# How are you funded?

Agronomics, the leading listed company focused on the field of cellular agriculture, has led our financing rounds to date including our recently completed seed round of £1.65M, with Agronomics holding a 35% interest in the company. Jim Mellon has joined the Board of Clean Food Group following the investment by Agronomics. Other early investors joining Agronomics include AIM-listed SEED Innovations Limited, a leading global food and beverage company, as well as venture capital investors.

# What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

Our biggest challenge so far has been the lack of availability of biotech infrastructure in the industry currently, meaning it has been difficult to find partners to help us produce large sample batches of our ingredients without waiting a long time for production back logs to clear.

We have overcome this by starting the process of building our own large-scale pilot plant facility, as well as finalising a very exciting retail collaboration with a partner that we will be announced soon.

# How does Clean Food Group answer an unmet need?

There are currently no viable sustainable alternatives to palm oil, which is the second largest contributor to deforestation in the world. On average, we each consume 8kg of palm oil every year.

Clean Food Group's pioneering technology and product will bring all of us closer to a more sustainable future.

# What's in store for the future?

Currently, we are working on building a large-scale pilot plant (capable of producing tons of oil per week) and collaborating with our commercial partners to use our Clean Palm Oil within their products across multiple industries. This will allow us to bring our product to market in 2023.

# What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

I would say the same thing that I said when someone asked me this in 2009, shortly after we started selling our first food products on a street market in London... Just getting started is the hardest and yet most valuable thing you can do. Don't be afraid to take the first step and have confidence in your own idea.

If like me, you're trying to tackle a 5K run and you've not done that much exercise before, it all starts with putting on your trainers and running gear and a short walk around the park!

Alex Neves is cofounder and CEO of _Clean Food Group_.

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