

# Soy product developers see world of opportunity

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**GUELPH**

Entrepreneur Deborah Williams says paraffin doesn't hold a candle to her soy-based alternative.

The owner of Williams Wicks makes soy candles, which she said burn longer, cleaner and cooler than petroleum-based paraffin wax, while holding a fragrance well and selling at a competitive price.

The family-based business has been making soy-based candles for about 18 months. "I spent six months before that researching and developing," said Williams.

Why?  
"I'm a candle lover, first and foremost," the former pre-school teacher said. She's also allergic to paraffin, which congests her lungs, she added.

Williams sees potential for a host of other products from soybeans and other crops rich in vegetable oil and protein. Soybeans can be turned into food, food ingredients, composite woods and plastics, lubricants and fuels, crayons, soaps and creams, to name a few. Her business, she said, may one day expand into some of these potential markets.

"I wouldn't close the door," said Williams. "To me right now, the sky's the limit."

Williams was commenting while staffing a Williams Wicks display in the River Run Centre at yesterday's annual meeting of Guelph-based Soy 20/20. Displays by others included lines of soy-based desserts, meat substitutes and pasta.

In its second year, Soy 20/20 is an organization promoting research, development and marketing of new soy-based products. Chair Peter Hannam told well in excess of 100 people attending, including entrepreneurs, industry representatives and scientists, that Soy 20/20 has attracted \$2.5 million in industry and government funds for such opportunities.

There are plenty of opportunities in areas as diverse as food, protein and flour production, as well as in industrial uses, such as fuels, Soy 20/20 executive project director Greg Penner said.

Creating new products means "hitting markets we haven't hit before," Penner continued.

He was referring to creating competitively-priced substitute ingredients for the chemical and plastics fields. Soy biodiesels, he said, haven't yet reached the point where they make economic sense, but with research he holds the hope costs for such industrial uses will drop to where they're viable alternatives.

"We spent thousands of years breeding crops for food," Penner said, adding it's time to consider industrial applications.

"I like challenges and I like technology and I especially like innovating," said keynote speaker Jack Grushcow, a Vancouver-based founder and chief executive of Linnaeus Plant Sciences. The science firm turns oilseed crops like castor beans into industrial and vehicle lubricants that Grushcow said are cleaner, higher-quality alternatives to petroleum products like motor oil.

"We've had 100 years of really cheap (petroleum) oil," Grushcow said, explaining that's why bringing to market better alternatives is a key challenge for the future, as is a regulatory environment that presents too many hurdles to oilseed alternatives.

Hydrocarbon-based petroleum oil, he said, isn't a good engine lubricant, which is why metal oxides harmful to the environment are added. "Vegetable oils work better than petroleum products," he said, stressing that includes soybeans.

If Canada is at the forefront of this growth in industrial uses for oilseed crops "we are in a position to have huge wins," Grushcow said. "We can do amazing things with oilseeds. Plants hold the answer to carbon."

Yves Potvin of Vancouver, another keynote speaker, recently created Garden Protein International to make a line of soy-based vegetarian alternatives to meat. He's marketing to what he called the "flexitarian," the 30 to 40 per cent of Canadians who don't just eat meat-based dishes.

"That's a growing market," said Potvin. "I truly believe this is the future of soy food. We're building a new category."

North Americans, he said, are increasingly concerned about meat contamination by pathogens and the effects of eating meat. Obesity, he said, has surpassed tobacco as the primary cause of premature death in the United States.

"People are looking for alternatives," Potvin noted. "I do believe soy is a miracle food and is the food of the future."

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A wide variety of soy products were on display at the River Run Centre during yesterday's annual meeting of Guelph-based Soy 20/20.

TYLER BROWNBRIDGE, GUELPH MERCURY

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