Program at Red River College allows companies to develop new, test and commercialize new products

Who knew that you could make miso soup from spent grains used in beer brewing? Or make an award-winning macaroon from hemp? The growing Culinary Research & Innovation (CRI) team at Red River College is doing some fascinating work in the prairies.

Established in March 2016 through an NSERC Innovation Enhancement grant, the CRI team has expanded and is able to extend their geographic scope to Saskatchewan and Alberta. The CRI program supports food production firms by providing the following services and opportunities:

- Product ideation
- Recipe development
- Food service application testing and development
- Food product consumer research trials
- Clinical trial recipe and meal development
- Food service technology development

Each project is designed to meet the specific needs of the industry partner. Culinary researchers work with the company to create and improve products with a goal to create new economic opportunities for the companies.

"As the only NSERC funded Culinary Research program in the prairies, we were asked to extend our research services to businesses across the prairies," said project founder and CRI Research Professional, Mavis McRae. "This is a really exciting opportunity for us, and for the agri-food industry in the region."

The goal of the NSERC grant is to increase the capacity of colleges to work with regional companies, with the aim of fostering product commercialization. This also benefits students, who get applied experience working on real-world projects alongside industry.

The CRI team brings a chef's perspective and experience to the applied research table. The team includes predominantly culinary professionals backed by food scientists, who work with food manufacturing and food service companies on a number of innovation areas.

Their work includes recipe development, food service ingredient application testing, product development, food product consumer research trials, clinical trials, and food service technology development.

To date, the CRI team has been engaged in a number of projects with local manufacturers and food service outlets. These projects often bring several companies together to deliver a prairie-made commercialization opportunities. Project examples include:

- A consumer research study on four new poultry products, including a newly developed frozen-to-oven roast, engaging approximately 400 general public consumers in a taste survey over four days.

- Using pulse flours to replace eggs in recipes, including the creation of an egg-free, nut-free French-style macaron.
- Multiple recipes developed for a co-product of a protein powder operation.
- Creating food service friendly recipes for barley that meet beta-glucan health claims.
- Miso paste developed using spent grain from the brewing industry.

The CRI program is open to incorporated agri-food and food service related companies in Western Canada who are seeking to innovate and bring products to market. The company will be asked to provide in-kind and cash support to the project, which is minimal during the initial engagement.

Further information about projects or the research program can be found on the CRI website or by emailing Mavis McRae at mmcrae30@rrc.ca.