

Border Chronicle

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QUICK FACTS

- * \$4 million investment
- * 10 extra jobs created
- * Anticipated completion date: January, 2012
- * Extra sales forecast of 28,000 tonnes p.a.

IT'S GOING RIGHT HERE: Checking over the plans at the Bordertown site of the new oat hulling facility for Blue Lake Milling Pty Ltd are Jeremy Neale (Site Electrician), Ashley Cook (Project and Product Development Manager), Digby Grosser (Incoming Product Coordinator) and Quentin Ashfield (Occupational Health and Safety Coordinator).

More oats = more jobs

J.L. ("FRED") SMITH

A BORDERTOWN company is set to employ a further 10 full-time and permanent workers due to a \$4 million expansion of its premises.

Ground works are underway at Blue Lake Milling Pty Ltd for the installation of new state-of-the-art oat hulling equipment.

If all goes to plan, it will be operational next January and take the on-site employee numbers from 90 to 100.

Production capacity will more than double from 500 to 1,200 tonnes per week and the quality of the breakfast oats for the domestic and overseas markets will improve.

Oat hulling is the term given to the process of removing the husk from the kernel.

The kernels are then flattened ("rolled") and used for porridge.

With an increase of annual sales of up to 28,000 tonnes anticipated, an extra 20-25 employees may eventually be required by Blue Lake Milling.

Soil preparation work began at the Pigeon Flat Road premises last week following the development approval 'green light' being given by the Tatiara District Council.

The equipment will be housed in a purpose-built building which will stand three-storeys high.

This will be built by contractors Ahrens Sherwell, of Adelaide, while the oat-hulling equipment has been sourced from a specialist milling supply firm from Germany.

A representative of this company will be travelling to Bordertown in the coming months to oversee the installation of this equipment.

It is the most significant expansion in the long history of Blue Lake Milling.

It had its origins in Mt Gambier in 1857 and moved to Bordertown in 1982 with the original mill in the Blue Lake

City now an entertainment complex.

In the past three decades, Blue Lake Milling has expanded the Bordertown premises and it now has an area of nine acres.

Blue Lake Milling also has a milling operation at Dimboola with a workforce of 20.

The company's shareholders are members of the local Cook family as well as Mt Gambier's Peter Collins.

The oat hulling equipment project has been on the drawing board for around a decade and follows a \$5 million investment in the Bordertown facility in recent years.

This sum has been spent on six steel silos which stand 26 metres tall as well as land acquisition and new warehousing and packaging facilities.

Blue Lake Milling Project and Product Development Manager Ashley Cook said the new oat hulling equipment which used the gravity-fed principle would bring many advantages.

He pointed out that the number of husks would be dramatically reduced and this type of product was keenly sought by both domestic and overseas consumers of their breakfast oats.

"Instead of three husks per 100 grams, Blue Lake Milling will be able to produce a world's best practice rolled oat with only one husk per kilogram.

"The process efficiencies gained will allow access to markets previously unattainable.

"Around 20% of the output of Blue Lake Milling is currently sent overseas to India, China and countries in South East Asia.

"From the beginning of 2012, we will have an increased product range to include kibbled product.

"This has the potential to reduce imports while increasing exports.

"The new equipment should generate a considerable increase in milling yield.

"There is a benefit for the suppliers of our oats as the new oat

hulling equipment will allow Blue Lake Milling to more efficiently mill and market drought-affected grain.

"About 20% of our oats come from the Tatiara with the bulk coming from the areas around Frances, Edenhope and Apsley.

Mr Cook also said the plant would no longer have to work on a 24/7 basis which cut into weekends for employees.

He said the working hours would become 24/5 from the beginning of next year.

"The installation of the oat hulling equipment over the next seven months will strengthen the Occupational Health and Safety of the site.

"Looking to the future, it also offers the possibility of contributing to a reduced carbon footprint through the steam/electricity co-generation concept," said Mr Cook.

As the ground has been prepared for the new building, construction is set to begin within the next fortnight.