



## **An Open Letter from Chris Green, Oat Innovations: Oats 2020 Tailpiece**

Dear All,

It was good to meet with old friends and make new ones during our Oats 2020 conference. I trust that you all benefited from being there and took away new knowledge and aspirations. As I pointed out in my closing remarks to the conference, I make a plea to those engaged in food manufacture to revisit how oat-based products are labelled.

### **Gluten Free**

Compositionally, oats are free from gluten. As pointed out in the [excellent presentation by Luud Gilissen](#), oats are safe to use for 99% of those suffering from celiac disease (CD). However, it is, of course, acknowledged that a small group of people carrying CD T cells may react to the avenin storage proteins contained in oats.

In my closing remarks, I asked manufacturers to consider treating the allergy warning on gluten in the same manner that they do for nuts; i.e., include a disclaimer that the product (as opposed to the oats themselves) may contain gluten because of contamination from gluten-containing cereals (wheat barley and rye) that are also handled in the factory. Not only do I feel that we are misinforming and confusing the consumer, but we are not helping the case for oats. I am fully aware of the need to be precautionary and to ensure that responsible labelling is given, but I am of the opinion that this can be achieved under a normal practice of including gluten under the allergy statement in the same way that nut allergy is treated.

Achievement of gluten free is challenging and can only be secured with the highest degree of provenance and assurance...from seed, to plant, to plate. What is encouraging is that, with the wider range of gluten free products available, whole families are now increasingly going gluten free with respect to their baked and processed cereal products, rather than treating their CD family member separately. This translates into more mouths and more consumers for oats. So, ahead of us, we have an opportunity to reposition oat in its rightful place as being compositionally free from gluten.

I was encouraged to hear from Luud that there are now moves towards presenting a more unified and consensus view by the various EU Coeliac Societies and it would, therefore, be helpful if the brand ambassadors for oats would do the same.

### **Vision and journey for oats**

In my closing remarks, I referred to the need to narrow the knowledge gap. Resilient supply chains are built upon strong partner relationships, where there is an understanding of issues in each sectorial link within that chain. At the grower end, there is scope to develop meaningful benchmarking to drive and share grower experience. In the market place, there is a need to forge short chain production systems with provenance and assurance, including having growers pay



royalties, which are streamed back into investment in plant breeding or, indeed, gluten free production (on which I have first-hand experience).

As plant breeders, our task is to ensure that we can maintain the crop competitiveness of oats. It is increasingly difficult to attract inward investment in oats when new technologies (including GM) abound in crops such as wheat, corn, soy, canola and cotton. It takes some 12 -15 years from making an oat cross to placing that variety in the market. So, in 2030, will GM oat be in our fields? On the supermarket shelf? Or still in the lab? Each of us has a role to drive forward oat, both in its development and uptake.

Being passionate about oat and its potential is one reason why I will leave Senova to embark on developing my Oat Innovation ideas, which include investigating and pursuing its use for humanitarian food aid programmes, as well innovative product development.

So, whilst I leave Senova behind, I will not be leaving oats. I will be delighted to exchange views and opinions on oats at any time.

I look forward to my new venture and to meeting many at the IOC in St. Petersburg in July.

With season's best wishes,

Chris Green, Oat Innovations, 10 Dec 2015



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