

Culture craze

By NICOLE WILLIAMS

YOGHURT is the answer for one Dandenong manufacturer looking to succeed.

While manufacturers continue to lay-off staff around the state, Chobani Australia (also known as Bead Foods) is expanding its factory and employee numbers by introducing a new yoghurt product to its production line.

It currently manufactures the Gippsland Dairy brand and now also imports Chobani Greek Yoghurt after the business was acquired by United States company AgraFarmer in July last year.

To make the unique Greek yoghurt in Australia, the USA based company is investing 'well over' \$20 million to build a new plant beside the existing Gippsland Dairy factory in Dandenong South.

Peter Meeks, Chobani Australia managing director, said the expansion would be a huge boost for its manufacturing capacity and its 135-strong employee base.

"The new plant will more than double our capacity," he said.

"The great thing is we are still working on what that means but it will definitely mean more people."

The expansion is also great news for local farmers.

Although the plant currently makes 250 tonnes of yoghurt a week, the Chobani brand required three litres of milk for every litre of yoghurt.

"We will obviously need much more milk which is a great thing for local farmers," he said.

The Australian company is hoping to replicate the success of the Chobani brand in

the United States where it went from an unknown brand to taking a strong hold on the yoghurt market.

"In five years, it has gone from having zero to 20 per cent of the total market," Mr Meeks said.

"It has never happened anywhere in the world - where a brand had taken such a strong market so quickly."

Bead Foods was established in the 1980s and in early 2000, the Dandenong South site started focusing on the manufacture of the Gippsland Dairy yoghurt and cream.

It now makes 250 tonnes of yoghurt each week and is one of the top five yoghurt manufacturers in Australia.

"Gippsland yoghurt is award winning and by overlaying it with another great product will mean we will be able to sell more yoghurt to more people."



Giving their best

Stephen Bradshaw, Betty Williams and Barry Whelan were among many volunteers recognised in the Greater Dandenong annual volunteer recognition awards last week.

For more turn to page 9.

Picture: DONNA OATES

Peter Meeks, Chobani Australia managing director, is bucking the trend of manufacturers by looking to expansion.