

Sticky date's raw hunger for naked foods

By CAM LUCADOU-WELLS

THERE'S nothing like promises of 'free and naked' to grab the attention.

Noble Park-based Kez's Kitchen has unleashed two liberatingly labelled health bars - choc mud and sticky date.

The Free and Naked bars meet lofty, guilt-free standards - a four-star health rating, cold-pressed, and nude of added sugar, gluten, wheat, GMO ingredients, sulfite, artificial colours, flavours and preservatives.

This vegan purity seems to be a lucrative product line, making its way onto major supermarket shelves across Australia.

Managing director Michael Carp said his company struck a winner, doubling its output when it started making gluten-free foods such as cereals in 2007.

It tapped into a hunger for healthy foods that "God meant us to eat", he said.

EAT LOCAL, DINE GLOBAL

"It led to tremendous growth. "The market is inundated with food and products, but not with innovation.

"It's obviously a tough environment dealing with major retailers but they're happy to support companies like us that show innovation and are flexible."

Mr Carp said his company couldn't just copy others to keep itself ahead.

It does extensive research with domestic consumers and emerging overseas trends to find its points of difference. "When you're a small

company, you can be attuned to new trends and move quickly."

The kitchen, which turns around more than \$10 million a year and employs 65 workers, started humbly in the late 1980s.

Back then, Mr Carp's sister Keren and mother Helen were cooking in a domestic kitchen, supplying cafes with choc-chip cookies and cakes.

It soon took off to a commercial kitchen, then a larger bakery in Abbotsford.

Mr Carp walked away from his job as a lawyer to hop on board in 1994.

In 1999 the kitchen moved to its present purpose-built bakery at Princes Highway, Noble Park.

"I saw their passion and enthusiasm," Mr Carp said.

"I just saw it as an incredible opportunity to work with my family."



Michael Carp tries his kitchen's Free and Naked bars. 139629

KEZ'S KITCHEN
PRINCES HWY NOBLE PARK
MICHAEL CARP

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KEZ'S KITCHEN



Michael Carp, Kez Ludski and Premier Daniel Andrews.

Biscuit booster

By Casey Neill

A Noble Park manufacturer will create 12 new full-time jobs thanks to a \$300,000 boost.

Premier Daniel Andrews visited Kez's Kitchen on Thursday 1 December to announce the funding.

"We're investing in the south-east to help businesses diversify into new markets, to help workers transition into new jobs and to help our local communities survive and grow," he said.

The cash will allow the family-owned manufacturer to invest \$1.5 million in new equipment.

It will help the company to increase its production of premium biscuits, cereals and snack bars, reduce waste and grow internationally.

As well as taking on 12 new full-time workers, Kez's will up-skill its existing team.

The business started in 1991 with Kez Ludski and her mother baking biscuits in the family home and selling them to local cafes.

Today managing director and Kez's brother Michael Carp owns and runs the business after

walking away from his job as a lawyer to hop on board in 1994.

The kitchen moved to its 45,000 square foot purpose-built bakery on Princes Highway in 1999 and today employs more than 100 people.

The cash came from the State Government's Manufacturing Program.

Companies can apply for up to \$500,000 under the program to invest in new technologies and processes that will create jobs and increase productivity.

The Journal has previously spoken to Kez's Kitchen about its Free and Naked bars which meet lofty, guilt-free standards - a four-star health rating, cold-pressed, and nude of added sugar, gluten, wheat, GMO ingredients, sulfite, artificial colours, flavours and preservatives.

Mr Carp said the company doubled its output when it started making gluten-free foods such as cereals in 2007.

He said the company completed extensive research with domestic consumers and emerging overseas trends to find points of difference.