

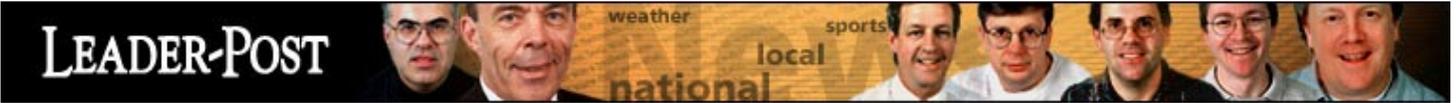


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NEWS STORY

Bruce Johnstone

Regina Leader Post

Pulse-processing plant to set up here

Regina will become the site of a \$5.2-million pulse processing plant next year, thanks to a deal between a Turkish company, the government's immigrant investment fund and a labour-sponsored venture capital corporation.

Saskcan Pulse Trading Inc., a joint venture involving Arbel Pulse and Grain Co. of Turkey, Saskatchewan Government Growth Fund and Regina-based Crown Ventures Fund Inc., will build and operate the plant.

Murad Al-Katib, president of Saskcan, said the company was formed in July for the purpose of building a 75,000-tonne-a-year lentil processing plant in Saskatchewan.

"We did decide on Regina (as the plant location) about two months ago," said Al-Katib, a Saskatchewan native of Turkish descent, who worked 5 1/2 years as a trade development officer with Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership (STEP).

The majority owners of Saskcan are the Arslan family, which controls Arbel, a 51-year-old company that's the oldest and largest pulse processor in Turkey. Arbel is also the largest importer of Canadian red lentils in the world, with annual imports of 32,000 tonnes of lentils. And Saskatchewan is the largest producers of lentils in the world, with 97 per cent of Canadian production.



Murad Al-Katib

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"The (Arbel) corporation É decided that there was the need to pursue a facility here, right at the source of supply," Al-Katib said.

Of course, lentils are not a major foodstuff in North America, with only half of one per cent of lentil production consumed here.

"This crop is grown destined for emerging markets in the world," said Al-Katib. "It's a staple of the diet in many of the countries we're exporting to (in) North Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia."

Lentils are also an inexpensive source of protein. "This is a high-protein, low sodium, high-fibre staple of the diet," Al-Katib said, adding many people in developing countries "can afford to purchase lentils. They can't afford to purchase meat."

Al-Katib said the deal came together in about 3 1/2 months. Crown Ventures Fund and SGGF are putting up \$1.2 million in debt and equity, pending board approval from Crown Ventures Fund.

The Arslan family is investing \$1.15 million in the venture, plus providing technical and marketing support.

About \$2.85 million in term financing is being provided by Farm Credit Canada and Business Development Bank of Canada, while operating financing is being provided by CIBC.

The total project cost, including operating financing, is about \$9.75 million. Al-Katib said the Saskcan plant is set to begin construction east of Regina, near the FarmGro organic processing plant, with completion scheduled for next July.

The plant will split 75,000 tonnes of red lentils a year, which involves cracking and removing the hull to reduce cooking time and polishing the seed for better appearance.

"We will be up and running for crop year 2002," Al-Katib said, adding the plant will employ 30 people initially. "We see this as just the beginning."

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