



Daniela Govetto, CEO of Daisy Health Foods ... "Removing gluten from the baking ingredients is a very challenging process."
Picture: ROBERT BOTHA

Using the right ingredients for a delicious business

Food scientist Daniela Govetto started Daisy Health Foods to provide South Africans consumers with healthy and tasty alternatives, writes Sanchia Temkin

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DANIELA Govetto, CEO of Daisy Health Foods, chooses La Cucina di Ciro in Parktown North to meet over lunch. I am delighted by her choice, since the restaurant is one of my favourites.

I am about to make a booking for two but discover that Govetto has already booked a table for us. She explains that she has arranged with three-star Michelin chef Ciro Molinaro to bake some bread with her product — Entice seed loaf mix. We will be eating gluten-free bread at our lunch.

Daisy Health Foods developed SA's first rice flour in 2004 as a gluten-free substitute for wheat flour. Sold under the brand Entice Rice Products, Daisy offers the rice flour to consumers who want gluten-free products and rice milk to those looking for an alternative to dairy or soya milk.

A food scientist, Govetto wears the minimum of make-up and is dressed in black. She has years of experience in the baking and milling industry. "I always wanted a business called 'Daisy' and decided on a name as far back as varsity," she says.

Govetto's interest in health food arose in her childhood. "My mother always made us interesting and healthy foods to eat.

She decided to enrol for a bachelor's degree in food science at the University of Pretoria in 1984. After qualifying, Govetto got involved in assurance and testing work at SGS, a Swiss-based inspection, testing and certification company.

"A lot of the work was done behind the scenes. We would visit retail stores, such as the likes of Pick n Pay and take swabs at the butcheries and bakeries. We would pick up problem areas," she says.

From SGS Govetto moved on to Tiger Milling & Baking where she worked in product and development. One of the projects that she worked on involved looking into the products and concepts of maize and wheat-based premixes. She stayed with the company for seven years, during which time she gave birth to her first child.

Govetto and husband Paolo decided to have a second child and she left the company. "I was a stay-at-home mom for five years and really enjoyed the experience," she says.

However, Govetto decided then that she needed to do something more with her life.

"I was open to exploring options but I didn't quite know what," she says.

By chance, while visiting her homeopath, a business opportunity presented itself.

"He suggested I meet up with someone in the rice business which I did."

That person subsequently introduced Govetto to his ex-wife, who is now her business partner — Lynette Templeton.

At this stage in our conversation, the waitress brings us the gluten-free bread that Ciro has baked especially for us. I am overwhelmed by its light texture. Govetto is taken aback that the chef has decided not to bake it as a loaf but rather as a flat bread, and is surprised by its "rather sweet" flavour.

"That's not normally how I would make it," she says, wondering if he has used her recipe.

Govetto and Templeton were encouraged to enter the Enterprise Business Plan Competition in 2003, an initiative of the National Business Initiative and McKinsey & Co. “Lynette and I put together a business plan for a rice milk. We filled out phase one for the competition.”

Govetto received a phone call from the organisers to say that they were in the top 10 out of 400 competitors. They entered the next phase of the competition and ultimately won the best start-up award.

The next moment we are interrupted by the flamboyant *Ciro*. Govetto wants to know what *Ciro* thought of her bread recipe. *Ciro* tells her he didn't use it as the consistency didn't bind as he would have liked.

“I like to use yoghurt and yeast; it must bind,” the chef says using his hands to demonstrate the binding movement. *Ciro* has some interesting and rather wild theories about gluten intolerances, including the lack of qualified bakers in the industry and the use of automated bread machines.

Govetto says that rice was chosen as a base for *Daisy's* products due to its hypo-antiallergenic properties. Rice is also the best grain for the digestive system as it does not ferment in the body.

Rice contains all 18 essential amino acids and is a good source of B-complex vitamins and minerals.

Because of the extensive use of flour in the baking industry, wheat — and wheat allergies — can be a major problem, Govetto says. There are no accurate figures for the prevalence of wheat allergy.

According to the Allergy Society of SA, clinical experience suggests that wheat allergy is relatively uncommon. However, it may be more common in certain subgroups. For instance, wheat allergy is responsible for asthma in up to 30% of people in the baking industry. Gluten-containing cereals, such as rye, oats, and barley may also cause a variety of symptoms, such as cramps, nausea, allergic rhinitis, and other symptoms involving the skin, due to cross-reactivity of the allergens.

Coeliac disease (also called gluten enteropathy) has until recently been known as gluten intolerance. Gluten is the protein found in wheat and flour that forms the structure of bread dough. “Removing gluten from the baking ingredients is a very challenging process,” Govetto explains. “You have to remove the wheat or the flour and it is very difficult.”

Entice rice flour and millet flour are substitutes for wheat flour. Govetto says that millet reduces acidity in the body and contains cholesterol-reducing properties. The company also has a chocolate cake premix, a muffin premix, a basic bread premix that can be turned into a seed loaf, and a variety of other interesting breads.

There are 15 people based in the factory in Brits. “They are involved in milling, administration, and packaging.”

With rice such a precious commodity and general food prices so high, Templeton has embarked on a plan for the business to grow its own rice. “We don't know what the cost will be per hectare but we are optimistic”, Govetto says. Templeton has also planted barley and quinoa, which is an alternative to white rice or couscous.

When the business started, Entice products were only available in health stores. “However, we couldn't really make anything from them,” she says. Now the products are available countrywide in supermarkets, health stores, and delis.

“The beauty of the product is that it works so well — it's light and very tasty,” Govetto says. “We set ourselves five- to 10-year goals. The business has grown as it has happened.”

“I consider myself to be very fortunate,” Govetto says.