

St. James gets a taste of Staffa-made soy butter

By Vanessa Brown

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Students at St. James were recently treated to a locally-made peanut butter alternative that's the first of its kind in Canada.

The kids were sent home with a sample serving of WOWBUTTER, a nut-free spread made from soy beans and manufactured by Hilton Soy Foods near Staffa. St. James's secretary Judy Renner said the soy spread is a healthy alternative for all kids, not just those with nut allergies.

"We've often had parents, whose children only like peanut butter and jam sandwiches, ask how they can substitute peanut butter," she said. "Lunches are hard, and this just gives parents one more option."

The Mahon family, who operate Hilton Soy Foods, capitalized on the need for a healthy alternative to peanut butter as more and more schools implemented peanut bans. President Scott Mahon said the company placed great emphasis on developing a product that looked and tasted just like the popular ingredient in peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

He added the company was able to roll out a nut-free spread without adding preservatives or artificial colour and flavour.

"That's something that's very important to parents nowadays," Mahon said. "They want to provide the kids with simple, basic, nutritious foods and that's what WOWBUTTER is."

The Mahon's support the Field to Table phenomenon, growing their own soy beans in a nearby field and purchasing soy from area farmers to supplement demand. Unlike most peanut butters found in grocery stores, all of WOWBUTTER's major ingredients are produced in Ontario. Hilton Soy Foods also funnels money back into local schools by donating 10 cents per jar when parents register on the website using that jar's PIN number and entering the school name.

Renner said St. James is looking to include the peanut alternative in its healthy snack program. For three years, parent volunteers have come into the school three times a week to serve up healthy foods to students during their morning break.

Mahon says there are two key differences in nutritional value that gives soy butter a leg up on its peanut counterpart. First, the protein found in soy is the equivalent to meat or dairy protein, which contains nine essential amino acids. Peanut butter has six essential amino acids. WOWBUTTER is also a natural source of omega 3 fatty acids, whereas peanut butter is not.

"Nutritionally, we wanted it to be just as good or better than peanut butter as well to make sure the kids are getting the nutrition they need," Mahon said.

The faculty at St. James asks that parents who pack a lunch for their kids containing a sandwich made from WOWBUTTER clearly label it as such so teachers know it's not peanut butter. The soy spread is available in Seaforth at Foodland. For more information, including recipe ideas, go to www.wowbutter.com.