

Getting more fresh food out to troops

Military helps fund tech that fights off mold, rot

By DONNA GOODISON



NEXT BIG THING

Military men and women serving abroad could soon be getting more fresh fruit and veggies thanks to a Woburn company.

Primaira LLC, a product development and commercialization company, has developed a low-cost, low-power technology to preserve fresh produce and prevent waste.

"It's a technology that improves the produce quality and extends its shelf life for transport, storage and retail," Primaira managing partner Karen Benedek said. "It's like an air purification technology that gets rid of the chemicals that accelerate ripening and lead to spoilage."

The "Bluezone" technology removes the ethylene emitted by fruits and vegetables from the refrigerated containers in which they're shipped and stored, and it inhibits the growth of microbes in the produce that lead to mold and rot.

Its development garnered Primaira a U.S. Army Small Business Innovation Research Achievement Award last week at the Pentagon Conference Center in Washington, D.C.

The 10-employee company's engineers develop products for Primaira to bring to market in addition to clients such as KitchenAid, Dupont, Genzyme, Viking Range and Whirlpool.

It's been focusing on the Bluezone technology for the last few years, backed by about \$1.7 million from the Army's SBIR program.

"Initially it was our technology that we applied to a need that the Army had," Benedek said.

The U.S. Department of Defense's Combat Feeding Directorate at the U.S. Army Natick Soldier Research, Development & Engineering Center has been overseeing the project.

"It's a technology that is suitable for use for all of the military services," said Pete Lavigne, a chemical engineer with the directorate's equipment and energy technology team. "It's very challenging to deliver fresh produce to a military environment. We're in the process of transitioning this technology to the field now."

The Army funding also will help Primaira commercialize the technology for civilian uses. The company is in talks with commercial entities in the refrigerated transport and residential refrigeration industries.

"The idea is that we get the cost benefits associated with commercial production rates," Lavigne said.

Primaira also sees other, non-produce applications for the technology.

"From a question of air cleaning and deodorization and sanitation, there are just so many applications — from the storage of cleats and pads and sports equipment in the home to more professional uses on the larger scale," Benedek said

— dgoodison@
bostonherald.com



STAFF PHOTO BY MATTHEW W

FARM FRESH: Karen Benedek and Phil Carbone of Primaira in Woburn show off the 'Bluezone' setup that will help get more fruits and vegetables to members of the military. Below, Carbone's son Mike helps assemble a 'Bluezone' box.

