

Plenty of food to go around

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The Plenty Food Group has made exporting a viable target for 40 per cent of its members interested in doing so while others, such as biotechnology research and development company Anadis, are already enjoying yields from offshore contracts.

Another five companies won orders in Brunei.

Further wins are expected as the group aims to increase combined offshore sales by \$10 million by the end of 2006 and to develop an export strategy for its members, focusing on Asia.

The Plenty initiative follows a survey two years ago of companies in Victoria's City of Whittlesea and Hume Council that identified the food sector as best placed to benefit from interdependent collaboration.

The survey also revealed that 40 per cent of the 85 companies polled in the region were interested in exporting and that 48 per cent already did.

Backed by a \$50,000 grant from the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Plenty group was formed to aggregate the trading power of food companies in Melbourne's northern suburbs.

It began by setting up training and development sessions focusing on challenges such as



Fred Mears of Anadis

cost reduction, chemical use and dealing with major supermarkets.

"Getting product into the major supermarket chains and finding opportunities in a global market can be overwhelming challenges for small business," says John Francis, director of economic development at the City of Whittlesea.

"There are often expensive issues around packaging and labelling specific to their product that they may not know about."

As exporting is a key issue, the group ran an export development workshop addressed by advisers from VECCI and agents with links to the Emirates, especially the large hotel chains.

It was here that Fred Mears,

operations manager for Anadis, which is listed on the Australian Stock Exchange, was advised that his company was not quite ready to export to the Middle East.

"We discovered that we didn't have the right product for the Middle East but now we know what we need to work towards and we've become accredited to export there."

However, it also found it was in a good position to bid for contracts in China.

With Plenty facilitating, VECCI advisers initiated market research for Anadis, arranged appointments with China-based companies and organised interpreters for the deal.

As a result, in 2004 Anadis won a \$2 million contract to supply China with its immune stimulant health product, and proceeds have funded further R&D for its biomedical arm.

Mr Mears said he expected more contracts from China in the future. However, the company is also relishing other benefits from its participation.

It has significantly improved its bacteria control after advice from a local cheese manufacturer and has reduced waste on advice from a chicken company within the group. It also substantially reduced energy, water and gas usage and is working with the Plenty group to monitor the environmental impact.