

SEAWEED HEALTH FOUNDATION

**1st Annual Conference, Natural History Museum, Kensington, London
3rd April 2012 at the kind invitation of the British Phycological Society
Introductory talk by S. B. Ranger (15 mins)**

PRIOR HAND OUT - Core purposes and Constitution

May I too, extend a very warm welcome to you all.

I address you as the founder both of the Seagreens seaweed business, and of this independent Foundation - of which, like you, I am a Member.

You might see a good deal of the presence of Seagreens here today, and of course this is inevitable. But as our Membership and the Foundation grows, proportions will change.

As a matter of principle, I am interested in being one of the human race, not in dominating it or in determining its future and this principle is written into the Constitution of the Foundation.

I know that you have come here, to the Natural History Museum in London today, from the top and the bottom of the British Isles. In a short while I will ask each of you, please, to introduce yourselves to the rest of us, which will help us during the day as we come to know more about one another.

A number of Members could not be with us today - including our Manufacturing Partners Martin Macleod and Malcolm Macrae from the Outer Hebrides, and Donnie Maclean from Glasgow who has just won an

Award for the first nutritionally balanced pizza which needless to say, contains Seagreens' seaweed.

The core of our interest is not only seaweed but each human being, because it is people who make things happen and people who get things done.

Today we are going to look back and see what has been accomplished. We will also look forward to see what we can accomplish together, for ourselves and for the greater good.

Our specific focus on health and the food chain should alert us to the relationship which exists between the whole of ourselves and the whole of the seaweed, between the nutritional components of the seaweed and the components of our own bodies, between ourselves and our environment, and between our intentions and our actions.

In this sort of context I will try and explain the rationale for the Foundation.

In the late 1990s, in the whole of Europe, there was no significant production of what we now call human food quality seaweed and it is this quality that the Foundation has been set up to engender on a wider basis, and to uphold.

When I was properly introduced to seaweed I had really only seen it as a slimy mass on the beach and it took me a couple of years to get excited about it. But I came to realise that it is a complete natural food, which contains within itself the most remarkable balance of all of the nutrients.

Comparing this to the profile of the foods that we grow or raise on the land, I could see that seaweed has none of the nutrient gaps, nor the excesses of nutrients which characterises so much of the modern diet.

I saw that the seaweed could fill all of these gaps in our everyday diet and perhaps more besides.

I created 'Seagreens' in 1997 and we set up to produce 'human food seaweed' among some remote Arctic islands in Norwegian Lapland.

Today we are continuing the development of what is now becoming recognised as an eminently sustainable new industry, with a small factory in the Scottish Outer Hebrides.

In addition to the word Seagreens, I added the baseline 'Feed the Foundation of Health'.

I have explained that I think that seaweed provides an outstanding foundation to our daily diet, whether in ordinary food or in a therapeutic setting.

But it was also part of my thinking that 'Feed the Foundation of Health' should have a double meaning.

It also spoke of the need for a Foundation through which to stimulate research and inform the public, and 15 years later this is that Foundation's first anniversary, and our first annual conference.

Now I should like to explain the other side of this double entendre to clarify, I hope, **why** the Foundation, and **why** human food quality seaweed.

At the end of the 1990s, and still today, the largest part of seaweed production is on a vast industrial scale - the aim is not quality, but quantity, and the cheaper the better!

The result is a bulk commodity sold in the market on price alone. This delivers only near-subsistence wages to most of the people involved, and has never been enough to re-invest in developing a quality product.

The seaweed is mainly broken down for its extracts - the alginates are used in a multitude of industrial processes - and the rest goes for horticultural use and to feed agricultural livestock.

Most of the world's seaweed harvesting is thus controlled by a few very large corporations for whom producing the best, human food quality seaweed simply is not the goal.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are an increasing number of small, artisan producers - often single men and women using the traditional methods to cut and dry wild seaweed - but as the Japanese experience attests, this will not sustain the population, it is not of consistent quality, and it has at some point to come under regulation.

What Seagreens has done over the past 15 years is to effect a marriage between the necessary technologies of volume production, with the care

and attention of artisan production, and the regulatory controls and quality procedures of biodynamic and organic food production.

The result is very consistent human food quality seaweed ingredients, which can be scaled up to provide a sustainable yet very large volume of one of the most nutritious traditional foods on earth.

There is ample evidence that only a very small number of people choose food because it is healthy; and as a result the food industry has a responsibility to produce healthy food.

Largely as a result of our research and promotional efforts, the food industry is beginning to look to seaweed as a new and exciting ingredient - so we need an industry capable of satisfying the demand, whether from small artisan or larger scale production, and to ensure that the seaweed they choose is as close as it can be to the quality which is produced by Nature.

But even our rigorous attention to the quality of our product is not enough.

We have to survive in the very challenging international regulatory environment which knows little about seaweed and above all we have to do the kind of scientific research that will demonstrate to consumers, industry and the media why it can be so very good for our health.

And this is all very costly.

For a start, it does not help us that so much poor quality seaweed is still being sold into the human food chain. In 2004 Japanese *Hijiki* was withdrawn in Europe because it contained excessive levels of aluminium. Only last year 5 tons of by-product from Irish alginate production was withdrawn for high levels of toxic dioxins. This year the Germans have rejected the import of French *Ascophyllum* for high levels of contaminants.

The point I am making is that human food seaweed has only been achieved - and can only be sustained - if we who see the value of seaweed are able to get that value for our products in the marketplace.

This means we must look after the integrity of our seas and our seaweed products. We must be able to support ourselves to challenge as well as to satisfy the inevitable bureaucracy. And we have to do the scientific research, and educate and keep informed the many groups of people who we wish to influence to buy our products - and benefit by what we produce for them.

And of course this is why we need more than a single producer of good quality seaweed - we need many producers of good quality - and I think we will need to help and support one another.

Above all, we need to sustain the value of our products in the market, the price that we can get for our products, because we must be able to sustain the very high cost of investment in quality production, in research, and in the means of educating our public.

If we fail to sustain the value of our product we can no longer sustain this virtuous cycle of improvement, research, education, improvement,

research, education - without which seaweed may once more be subsumed by an industry that cares more for quantity than quality and has no interest in the nutritional and healing properties of the myriad of seaweeds around our shores.

Britain has the capacity, the skills, and the integrity to become a - perhaps the - world class producer. There is an industry here in the making, if we act in concord.

So this is **why** the Foundation and why Human Food Seaweed - which the Foundation is well positioned to foster and protect.

Dr Craig Rose will show us the remarkable degree to which interest in seaweed over the last 15 years has developed, and what we now need to elicit and encourage is what perhaps I might call a 'community of interest' - a 'constituency of stakeholders' - who can take up and carry forward and outward, this new and important impulse and idea, in their own as well as the public interest.

I use the word impulse because I think it is welling up from beneath the vast oceans, stemming from the primordial and pristine, with so much to contribute to the nutrition and the cleaning and healing of our modern world.

The Foundation exists to provide for us a forum wherein we can come together to explore all kinds of commercial and non-commercial ideas, which can behave as a catalyst to turn innovation to commercial advantage,

which can voice our concerns on issues which need addressing, and give the world some positive news which might otherwise simply go unheard.

All this will drive up the value of what we have to offer, and that will enable the offering to undergo continuous improvement and the virtuous cycle can continue.

In setting up the Foundation, we have agreed some basic ground rules which together with some simple operating procedures form our Foundation's Constitution.

You should have found a copy of this on your seat and I hope you will take it away and read it, because it sets out our core purposes, and the parameters within which our individual and collaborative activities can be embraced.

I sincerely hope that some of you will want to contribute - in however small a way - to the tasks and challenges before us, and that next year we will meet again perhaps with Members from other countries too, to review and plan the steps needed to ensure the success of the many good people involved in this fledgling industry.
