

Diabetics can join the bubble tea party with healthier version

PETALING JAYA: A Malaysian-owned company has developed low Glycemic Index (GI) pearls, sugar syrup and sugar caramel for bubble tea that is safe for diabetics.

Expected to be available in the Malaysian market in the first quarter of next year, the low-GI ingredients for bubble tea was made by ASX-listed Holista CollTech Ltd in collaboration with local fruit processing company SunFresh Fruit Hub Sdn Bhd (Fruit Hub).

Fruit Hub's parent company in Taiwan supplies tapioca pearls to several bubble tea chains in Greater

China with a combined network of over 5,000 stores.

Fruit Hub has started manufacturing pearls at its facility in Lanchang, Pahang, with production expected to hit 300,000 tonnes a month by year end.

"The bubble tea fad is not going to go away.

"The challenge is to offer a healthier version which can significantly reduce the potential of higher incidence of diabetes and obesity.

"We are combining science with the market reach and understanding of the needs of bubble tea man-

ufacturers and vendors to offer a healthier alternative without increasing cost of production," Holista founder and chief executive officer Datuk Dr Rajen Manicka said.

A lower GI is healthier as more time is taken to digest and absorb glucose.

A typical 500ml bubble tea drink contains at least 8.5 teaspoons of sugar.

Rajen said this would give the company access to a wider market for its healthy ingredient products.

According to research firm Allied

Market Research, the global bubble tea market is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 7.4% from 2017 to 2023, hitting US\$3.21bil (RM13.46bil) by 2023.

Meanwhile, Straits Research estimated that Malaysia's bubble tea market was valued at US\$49.8mil in 2018 and is expected to grow at the rate of 6.9% from 2019 to 2026.

Holista has gained global market acceptance for its low-GI noodles, roti canai and chappati.

The opportunity to address the bubble tea sector came about through its collaboration with Fruit

Hub, Rajen said.

"Fruit Hub has a strong network among the major bubble tea chains," Fruit Hub managing director Foong Wai Fong said.

"We are confident that these three ingredients will make a real difference and can take the creative beverage industry to a new level, a tastier and healthier version, in which consumers can enjoy the drink without health concerns.

"It is our vision that this endeavour will place Malaysia as a centre of innovation in the beverage sector."