

# Lifestyle & Ents

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Deirdre and James Cunningham with their daughter, Molly: NORI Bake seaweed blend is “a spoonful of superfood.”

# SUPERFOOD

■ Galway couple are putting seaweed on the health menu

# Superfood that has its roots in our ancient past

■ Dearbhla Geraghty meets a Galway couple who are putting seaweed on the health menu

It is unusual for a product to win a Good Food Award when it does not even taste like its sole ingredient - seaweed - but that is one of the main reasons why locally produced superfood, NORI Bake, is gaining such a following.

For our ancestors, who had little choice but to forage for food in their immediate surroundings, the value of seaweed for health and wellbeing was well known. And while the age of supermarkets and fast food practically killed off the practice for a few generations, it is certainly the buzz word in today's health food industry.

James Cunningham of NORI Bake, the dried seaweed blend that can be added to such things as bread, porridge, soup, and smoothies, says that 1.5g of the product has the same nutritional benefits as eating 15g of raw seaweed.

"Traditionally, we would have been brought up eating seaweeds in the past, and would have known about its medicinal functions," he says.

"Dillisk was the 'beef jerky' for farmers - when they were out in the fields and sweating, they'd always have a bag of dillisk in their pockets. It would be replacing salts, and was also a great source of protein for them. Seaweed also has a huge satiety factor, so it makes you feel full for longer."

James and his wife, Deirdre, a nutritionist, are the parents of five children and are also behind the new SMRT health bars, and Mulberry's Restaurant in Barna village.

It was through the latter that James, a former electrician, started foraging on his own doorstep. He learned that the same species exist in Ireland and the British Isles - although our season may be later because it is colder, and that every place is unique due to its soil.

"The world trend in food now is the Icelandic forage, and the farm-to-fork method - traceability, sustainability - which is very in vogue at the moment.

"We try and buy everything locally - and what's more local than seaweed, elderflower, wild garlic, and sea aster.

"Most of these you would use in small amounts, but for the things you use in large amounts there's any amount of them - wild

garlic is all over the country, when in season.

"Seaweed is a sea vegetable, and is a seasonal product. The types are different at different times of the year, some months are better than others. At the moment, sea spaghetti is tough and chewy, but a month ago it was perfect.

"Nutritionally, seaweed is like any vegetable, when it gets big it is not as good for you, as the nutrients aren't as concentrated. So, it is important that seaweed is harvested at optimum times, for nutritional benefits."

It may come as a surprise to learn that there are thousands of different types of seaweed in Ireland, and that our west coast hosts its own unique variety.

"We have a huge supply of seaweed, coming from a clean ocean with dense nutrition in it to feed the plants," he adds.

"It's like planting something in great soil, which has great fertiliser - the Atlantic Ocean is like the soil, and the seaweed absorbs nutrients from that."

The seaweed is not picked off the beach, however, it has to be pulled fresh from rocks when the tide is out, and different varieties grow at different depths. There are even some types that can only be accessed during low spring tides.

James was curious as to how he could introduce seaweed into the menu at Mulberry's, so he started making bread from what he had foraged himself. Through trial and error, he found that different seaweeds worked in different ways.

He then approached Stefan Kraan, one of the leading seaweed scientists in the world, who was based in NUI Galway. They did some tests and then decided to amalgamate, to form Connemara Food Ventures with Inagh Valley Trust.

NORI Bake is a blend of eight different seaweeds, which has been key to the success of the product for both industry users and regular consumers.

"We found that by putting in different seaweeds, we were able to add more liquid or more hydration into our baking, and we could reduce the added salt because seaweed has natural sodium - 3%, compared to



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40% in salt," says James.

"It is a spoonful of superfoods for all your baking - you just add it to food, it is not an alternative to something else.

"One spoonful in bread will boost it nutritionally, increase the hydration, and keep your bread softer and fresher for longer. You can use it as a condiment, instead of salt/pepper, and in smoothies, or sprinkle on porridge, soups, stews and salads.

"It is an ideal way to get iodine into your system - we are not getting enough in our diet. In the past, we got it in our fish, vegetables, and the land. We need iodine for normal cognitive development, thyroid function, and growth in children.

"Seaweeds are pre-biotic, probiotic,

there's 97 different natural occurring nutrients, which are bio-available, which means they are easily absorbed by humans, and the main minerals are not affected by the cooking process.

"All you need to use is a little bit every day - the daily RDA is 1.5g, which is a quarter of a teaspoon, or one teaspoon in a loaf - if the recommended amount is used, you won't taste it.

"There is no comparison to any other single-variety seaweed on the market."

The commercial version of the product, NORI Bake Pro, has a huge appeal to hotels, restaurants, coffee shops, and delis, as it is a natural preservative, so helps keep products fresher and hydrated for longer, which



Deirdre Cunningham and her daughter, Molly. Deirdre, a nutritionist, says their NORI Bake seaweed blend is rich in iodine, which contributes to normal growth of children, among many other benefits. PHOTOS: PETER HARKIN.

makes products more suitable for freezing. "Seaweed also has a umami effect, which works like vanilla in baked goods, or if you use a little bit of salt, it will bring out the salt flavour. It also has the effect of a taste lingering on your tongue - so whatever flavour you're bringing out, it stays with you."

Jimmy Griffin, who judges baking championship across the world, has used it in cooking demonstrations in Russia, the USA, Italy, France, and Germany.

NORI Bake is available to buy in Evergreen Stores; Supervalu Barna; The I2 Bakery in Barna; Ali's Fish Shop in Barna; Joyce's Supermarkets; Morton's in Salthill; Griffin's; McCambridge's; Healthwise; Open Sesame in Gort and Ennis; Apple Health Foods in

Loughrea; and Nature's Gold in Rathcoole/Greystones.

And it is also being distributed nationwide through the distributor, Irish Independent Healthfoods.

The plan, however, is to expand across Europe, and they are currently in discussions with a Dutch company, who plan to launch a premium mainstream seaweed bread, using NORI Bake.

Catch James at Bake Fest in Leisuriland on Saturday (4-5pm), where he will demonstrate baking with NORI Bake (all in aid of ACT for Meningitis).

For more details contact James Cunningham, 087 2830433, email james.cf@gmail.com, or visit [www.nori.ie](http://www.nori.ie).

## Seaweed helps to counteract nutrient deficiencies in our diet

Recognising NORI Bake for a prestigious Great Taste Award is confirmation that seaweed is a buzz-word in the current health market.

But this particular blend has also made the 'superfood' versatile and easy to use for the everyday shopper, who is conscious about what they eat.

Iodine is lacking in our diets. Although, governments around the world have introduced iodine into table salt, to counteract this deficiency, in Ireland not all table salt contains iodine. And, as it is recommended to reduce our salt intake, the need for iodine remains.

Seaweed can be the main source of this nutrient in our diet, which the Food Safety Authority of Ireland says contributes to normal energy-yielding metabolism, growth of children, functioning of the nervous system, maintenance of skin, production of thyroid hormones and thyroid function, and cognitive development - NORI Bake contains 96 more nutrients.

The product has been endorsed by Michael McCambridge of the brown bread fame: "For Irish soda breads, NORI Bake is a perfect ingredient to compliment fresh buttermilk and Irish wholemeal flour. It locks in the moisture, and ensures your bread stays fresh."

Seaweed has also been used in the pro-

duction of the well-known SMRT Bar, which is based on five natural ingredients.

### Irish Brown Soda Bread

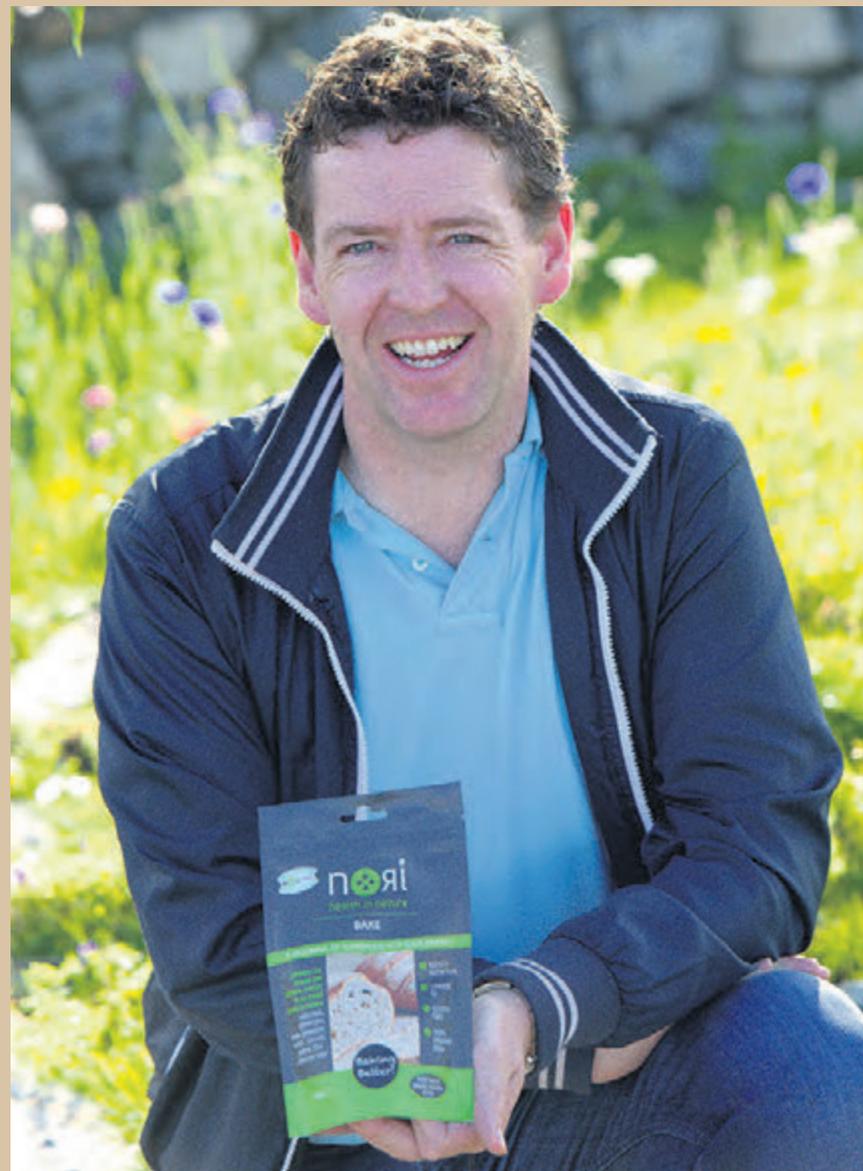
#### Ingredients:

- 350g Plain white flour
- 350g Wholemeal flour
- 2 teaspoons of NORI Bake
- 25g Brown sugar
- 0.5g Salt
- 1 heaped teaspoon of bread soda
- 0.75ltr Buttermilk
- Some porridge oats for sprinkling on top...

#### Method:

- Pre-heat oven to 190c
1. Sieve flour and bread soda together, add the salt
  2. Mix in brown sugar and NORI Bake
  3. Add buttermilk and mix well
  4. Divide mix into two greased 1lb baking tins
  5. Sprinkle some porridge oats on top
  6. Place in pre-heated oven for 45-50 mins

When cooked, bread should sound hollow, if you knock on the bottom of the tin. Wrap in a clean damp cloth, and allow it to cool.



James Cunningham of NORI Bake seaweed blend. "Our ancestors, who had little choice but to forage for food in their immediate surroundings, knew the value of seaweed for health and wellbeing," he says.