

## Saskatoon Colostrum Company – Growing beyond borders

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Mother Nature's super food has created a very healthy niche market for a Saskatchewan company. Saskatoon Colostrum Company Ltd (SCCL) is the only company in Canada that manufactures dried bovine colostrum products for cattle, pets and humans. Established in 1994, SCCL has grown to an international level with worldwide markets.

Colostrum is the first milk produced by all mammals after giving birth. Through this special milk, immunity is transferred from mother to baby – along with nutrients, cytokines (proteins released by cells that affect their behaviour and interactions between cells), and growth factors. In cattle, colostrum is essential for calf survival and long-term health. Using the heat-treated colostrum replacer reduces the incidence of Johne's disease in newborn calves and improves the health of high-risk calves. Johne's disease is a chronic disease that can cause significant

losses in milk and beef production. Bovine colostrum has many of the same ingredients as the colostrum from other species, including humans and companion animals.

Dr. Deborah Haines, Director of Research and Regulatory Affairs for SCCL, says Saskatoon's life science infrastructure was essential to establishing the company. She credits three organizations for helping SCCL along its way from start-up to success. First, POS Pilot Plant, a confidential contract research, toll processing, and analytical services organization located in Saskatoon. "We would not have been able to start this company without access to POS Pilot Plant, so that was really key."

The second element was funding from Ag-West Bio. "That seed money moved us from being a little company operating out of our garages and basements." The funding allowed the company to expand and finance necessary licensing requirements in order to enter the lucrative U.S. market. In 2009, SCCL fully re-paid the Ag-West funds, a milestone that is a reflection on the company's diligent planning and ability to weather the market.

Finally, a good arrangement with the University of Saskatchewan completed the picture. Dr. Haines, a veterinary microbiologist, and immunologist Brian Chelak, co-founders of SCCL, were both employees at the U of S. For years, product research and development, and quality assurance testing was done in Western College of Veterinary Medicine laboratories. A unique 10-year royalty arrangement with the University was established early on, so both organizations would benefit.

Dr. Haines says Dr. Stephen Acres, president of Saskatoon Colostrum since 2000, was instrumental in the company's international growth. Before beginning his tenure at SCCL, Dr. Acres was director of Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization (VIDO) from 1984 to 1993, and president of BIOSTAR, a VIDO spin-off company. BIOSTAR was the first company in the world to market a genetically engineered subunit vaccine for cattle.

When SCCL outgrew the pilot stage, they manufactured at a contract processing facility in northern Alberta until 2006, when they completed their own facility in Saskatoon's North Industrial area. SCCL now has 20 full-time employees, as well as territory managers contracted to pick up colostrum from 1900 different farms in six Canadian provinces. Their products are sold in Chile, Japan, Mexico, the UK and the United States.



SCCL established a distributor system to sell its products, allowing them to focus on product development. They provide technical product support, leaving the marketing to distributors. This focus and dedication has helped SCCL build a strong international reputation as a developer and supplier of superior-quality products.

The colostrum product for livestock animals are regulated as a veterinary biologic, like vaccines. Although this is not a perfect fit, Dr. Haines admits she has become more patient with regulations over the years – noting that Canada and the U.S. are more reasonable and less bureaucratic than some countries – and says it’s important that we maintain high standards.

SCCL’s human health products are registered as Natural Health Products. Although they are available for sale in Canada, Dr. Haines says SCCL has not yet found a Canadian distributor, a task still on her “to-do list.” Bovine colostrum is thought to contain more than 90 ingredients beneficial for human health, and is used in countries around the world in over 60 foods and beverages, and in skin care products. It is consumed orally to treat and prevent a variety of diseases, to improve immunity, as an aid to weight loss, athletic performance and stamina, and for general health. Saskatoon Colostrum sells the human health products mainly to Asian and Mexican markets where, Dr. Haines says, NHPs are more ingrained in the culture and tradition than they are in North America.

Recently, Saskatoon Colostrum sold to Koepon Holding, a Dutch company that owns dairy farms in six countries and artificial insemination (AI) centres around the world, including SCCL’s biggest distributor and sister company, Alta Genetics, located outside Calgary, Alberta. Alta is the largest privately owned AI reproduction and genetic improvement company in the world.

Dr. Haines says a limiting factor for the business in Canada is the number of dairies. As a solution, plans are in the works for a second manufacturing plant in Mexico, a country with many large dairy operations. SCCL is also expanding business in Chile and into other South American countries, as well as Central America.

For more information about the company and its products, go to [www.saskcolostrum.com](http://www.saskcolostrum.com)