Initial Brief

Our mentors at MPI set us a brief to develop a novel food product or ingredient for an export market, aimed at families with school age children. This product needed to contain a major ingredient from New Zealand’s primary industry and showcase the New Zealand brand.

Specifications given

• Must be targeted to consumers in a selected overseas market.
• Must consider food safety risks and hazards that could affect our product.
• Should consider the nutritional requirements of the target consumers.
• Could add value to an existing animal product.
• Could be a consumer product with cooking and storage instructions.

Research

• Singapore is already one of New Zealand’s largest markets for food and beverage products in Southeast Asia, exports are valued at $559.9 million.
• Singaporeans are increasingly health conscious and healthy foods in schools is a priority.
• There is an increasing demand for Halal certified products.
• Singaporeans eating out more and buying more convenience meals due to their busy lifestyles.
• Singaporeans also have a growing interest in buying frozen foods to reduce their grocery bills are they are generally 20% cheaper than fresh meat.
• Singapore is also a very multicultural country resulting in a variety of cuisines and cultural flavour preferences.
• As of 2018 the racial demographics are Chinese 74.3%, Malay 13.4%, Indian 9.1%, and other 3.2%. Of these people 14.9% are Muslim and 5.2% are Hindus.
• Singaporeans have become more concerned with knowing the sources of their food and around food sustainability.

Concept Development

Biltong
One of our initial concepts was biltong to which we added horopito and kawakawa. We tested whether lamb was suitable for making biltong and the acceptability of this product with the target market. The expense of the lamb cut required and the negative response from our International student focus group led us not to continue with this concept.

Lamb Buns
We developed a filled steamed lamb bun blending traditional Asian and New Zealand flavours, designed to be a readymade frozen meal. During the development of this concept, we optimised our lamb filling with the addition of kiwifruit and the use of lamb shoulder. We investigated using different flours for our bun.

Sensory Testing

We conducted several sensory evaluations with Asian international student focus groups, while our largest sensory trialling took place during the school open evening where we tested our lamb filling and buns with parents and prospective students. The results were that the main preference was for reduced sugar and white flour.

Prototype Development

Pulled Lamb Filling
Our final concept is a multi-purpose pulled lamb filling that can be used in a variety of different cuisines and is convenient for busy families with school age children, with the potential to prepare a whole meal. Below is the testing that we did on our filling.

Cooking and Marinating Testing
We investigated the action of Action on our lamb when marinated overnight compared to when we added it directly to the pot. We saw a dramatic difference between the two. In conjunction we tested for optimum cooking time and found that for the kiwifruit marinated meat it was 2 hours at 150°C.

Unmarinated left, marinated lamb right
Kiwifruit pulp used as marinade

Viscosity testing
We compared the gelling properties of chia seed and corn flour. We found that the proportion that was most similar to the corn flour gel was the 15 grams of ground chia to the 150g of water.

Corn flour gel
Chia seed gel
Timed syneresis testing

Synereisis testing
We conducted a Syneresis test to compare the difference in water loss/loss between chia seed and corn flour from frozen. At first the chia held water better but at the end the difference between the two evened out.

Packaging

We are using retort packaging. Retort packaging is shelf stable and able to be shipped easily due to its flexible nature, it is also lighter than cans while the shelf life remains relatively the same. This retort canning method also allows consumers to reseal the package after use. Our packaging had to be both attractive to the consumer and informative about our product. We advertise the New Zealand aspects of our product by using New Zealand iconography and attract the consumers eye through bright visuals.

Further Development

• For further development of a range of complimentary products to serve with our filling such as bao and roti. We have already developed our wholesome bun and we could consider an activated charcoal bun as well.
• We could further increase the health benefits of our product by adding shredded vegetables and other flavours into the filling.
• A potential development is the use of our lamb filling as a commercial product in Singaporean schools. In order to do this, we would develop our product to meet the Healthier Choice Symbol guidelines required in Singaporean school.

Final Evaluation

Our product meets the brief by showcasing New Zealand lamb, horopito, kawakawa and kiwifruit while being suitable for busy working families. It provides a high protein and reduced sugar, Halal product. We have considered food safety and convenience by the use of retort packaging as well as the climate and demands from our market.

Thank you to these people:
Our mentors, Hillary Tassos and Angie Young from MPI
Our teachers, Natalie Greig and Rob Harper
Our sponsors, Fiona Davis, Trading Petone & Brands NZ
Patrik Raj & Wendy Binks for feedback
Te Rakau Food Hub Systems and Banks Trading Network
And to Louise Whiteman Road Safety Jenny Cole for making CREST possible