

LAIRD SUPERFOOD: WeWork has invested in Sisters company

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Three days away from a public offering of stock to raise capital, Laird was approached by WeWork with an offer to invest in the company so they could remain privately held. The company will use the new funds to grow its operations and add to its line of superfoods that already includes coffee, coconut water, a variety of creamers, and matcha hydration packs.

WeWork announced last week that it was rebranding as The We Company, which would comprise three business units – WeWork (a space-sharing business), WeLive (a short-term housing business), and WeGrow (a group of elementary schools). In conjunction with the investment from WeWork, Arik Benzino, WeWork’s Chief We Officer for the U.S., Canada and Israel, will join the Laird Superfood board of directors.

According to Paul Hodge of Sisters, CEO and co-founder of Laird Superfood, “We are incredibly grateful to our investors and the community for their continued support. Our expansion will enable us to grow our product offerings, make room for even greater innovation, and double down on our presence in the industry. This growth will add a great number of jobs in Sisters and the surrounding communities, across a variety of departments, and allow us to continue to stimulate our local economy.”

Hodge told *The Nugget* that the forgivable loan given to Laird by the City of Sisters helped them jump-start their operation in town and indicated the City’s seriousness in wanting Laird to come to Sisters and stay.

A second 16,000-square-foot production building, located next to one now operating, is close to being completed. That building will make use of “condensed racking” with storage rack that will have reduced four-foot spacing (in building one they are 12 feet apart), utilizing a special forklift that can fit in and operate between the closer racks so they will be able to store three times as much product in the same amount of space.

Within the next three to four years, Hodge predicts they will employ 500 people from production workers to top-level executives and everyone in between. Two-thirds of the employees will be involved in production.

They handle every aspect of their operation in-house including sales, advertising, accounting, shipping, production, and marketing. By controlling all their own functions, and not including middlemen, they are able to more closely control overall costs and quality.

Laird Superfood products are currently available online and in 1,500 stores. Eight hundred packages a day are shipped from their website. They also sell through Amazon. Hodge forecasts that in a few years, they will be found in 10,000 stores.

They plan to expand rapidly, partially possible because of a distribution agreement as part of the deal with WeWork. The companies are launching a partnership, which will fill the WeWork kitchens in their 270 locations with Laird Superfood products. They will begin by offering them to members and employees in select New York City locations.

The current one-building production facility is spotlessly clean, with workers dressed in long white coats, head coverings, and gloves. Every ingredient is tested at every level — on the farm, during shipping, in its raw state, and finished product.

Stainless steel equipment processes and packages thousands of packages a day of the various products. One machine takes dry, clean coconut and every three minutes produces 500 pounds of powdered product in a room maintained at 50 to 52 degrees at all times. It took 70 trials to get the machine they wanted and they ended up having one custom designed. The powdered coconut is used in all Laird creamers, hydrates, and Activate.

An auto-packaging machine weighs every bag for precise weight. Each bag is then X-rayed and time-stamped for quality assurance. The X-raying procedure goes above and beyond FDA requirements and protects the company from consumers trying to scam them by claiming there was a foreign object in their purchase. They will be able to recall the X-ray of a precise bag to prove it left the facility with no foreign object in it.

Due to a lack of storage space locally, raw material is currently stored in Eugene and shipped multiple times a week to Sisters. On the drawing board is a 30,000-square-foot warehouse, which will provide ample needed storage. Hodge hopes it will be completed in eight months once the design is complete and permits are secured.

Laird has an option to

buy all the land to the east of their current production facility on Lundgren Mill Drive east to the stop sign. Hodge said they would exercise that option in April 2019.

The company is named after Laird Hamilton, world-famous big-wave surfer in Hawaii, who was looking for a healthier creamer for his coffee. His friends liked what he came up with and in 2015 Hamilton co-founded the company with Hodge. The company’s mission is to bring clean, simple, and thoughtfully formulated superfoods to the masses. Their offerings are environmentally sustainable, responsibly tested, and made with

whole-food ingredients that are organically grown.

The coconut comes from “farm-to-fork” farms in S.E. Asia that are regularly monitored for quality. Coconut is not grown commercially in the U.S. Their coffee is shade grown at high altitudes in Peru where it enjoys a long growing cycle. The coffee berries are all handpicked only after they are ripe. Wet, rather than dry, processing reduces the acidity. All roasting is done in a facility in New York. The coffee is decaffeinated using an expensive Swiss water process, not using any chemicals like most decaf coffees.

Many of Laird’s products

contain aquamin, a calcified marine algae that offers numerous benefits like improved joint health and lowering blood glucose levels.

Hodge said that the progress of the company is “going just as planned.”

The culture of the company attracts employees who enjoy the culture of Sisters. Hodge said Laird pays above average wages for their type of industry and they offer a robust benefit package.

“It’s the most sustainable company I have built,” said Hodge, “due to its core foundation of product evolution and building for the long haul.”

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