



**THE MARKET**

Australians eat it as a matter of course. Australians overseas scour the shops for it and get their families to send them supplies through the mail and even in diplomatic pouches. Vegemite is a national icon, but it is even more than that: it is a much-loved part of the Australian diet.

Ask people about yeast spreads and, as likely as not, you will receive a blank look. Mention Vegemite and there is instant recognition. There are bald facts about Vegemite, such as the fact that 60 per cent of it is consumed at breakfast, and most is eaten on toast. But they cannot convey the full flavour of this unassuming black paste.

In the Australian market, Vegemite is the generic term for yeast spreads. It is the one spread that is introduced to the family almost as a duty, a ritual in the pattern that determines what it is that makes an Australian family. Vegemite, it seems, has always been around and families have always eaten it. Not that its enjoyment is restricted to family use: for example, Vegemite fought alongside the Anzacs in the Second World War.

The production facilities have the capacity to produce 235 jars of Vegemite a minute, and 22.7 million jars are produced in Australia every year.

**ACHIEVEMENTS**

The yeast from which Vegemite is made is one of the world's richest known sources of B complex vitamins, especially thiamin, riboflavin and niacin. These vitamins are retained in the extract, and a thin spread of Vegemite (the amount on a single slice of bread) will supply between a third and two thirds of a seven year old child's daily requirements. For adults, it supplies between a quarter and a half.

B Complex vitamins are essential in the body's use of proteins, carbohydrates and fats. Few other foods can match Vegemite's contribution to the diet. While it is true that Vegemite contains salt, the total amount in a typical spread



is less than the amount of salt in the slice of bread it is spread on.

Vegemite contains no fat, and contributes almost no kilojoules to the diet. That makes it the ideal spread for those who are watching their fat, cholesterol or kilojoule intake for health or cosmetic reasons. Vegemite's reputation as a healthy food is well deserved.

The popularity Vegemite enjoys today might tempt us to think that its introduction to Australians was easy. Not so. In 1923, when Fred Walker launched Vegemite, an English yeast spread dominated the Australian market. Shoppers were reluctant to add Vegemite to their baskets, and sales languished. The product was

actually renamed only four years after its introduction, and relaunched as "Parwill". This was an attempted play on words: "If Marmite... then Parwill" was the intended pun, but it fell on deaf ears.

Walker went back to his first choice of name, Vegemite, when he became convinced that the problem was essentially to get consumers to try the product. To stimulate this, he launched a vigorous two year

coupon redemption scheme and gave away a jar of Vegemite with every purchase of another product in the Fred Walker Cheese Company range. The campaign worked: consumers tried the product, and loved it. Baby health Centres across the nation were even recommending it as an ideal food supplement for both babies and nursing mothers.

Australians of all ages continue to love Vegemite today. Its unique flavour could almost be called the taste of Australia.

It is a special point of pride that Vegemite jars and labels have been eminently recyclable or reusable right from the beginnings in 1923 to today.

**HISTORY**

At the beginning of the 1920s, the Fred Walker Cheese Company had a successful business making, selling and exporting cheese and other food products. In 1922 its owner Fred Walker decided that it was time to tackle the concentrated yeast spread market, then dominated by an imported brand from England. He commissioned his chief chemist, Cyril P. Callister, to develop an Australian yeast spread.

At the Albert Park, Melbourne combination test kitchen and laboratory Dr Callister, who incidentally became Australia's leading food technologist of the 1920s and '30s, experimented with brewers' yeast from the Carlton & United brewery. By 1922 he had developed the spread that Walker wanted. The product was ready, but the name wasn't.

Fred Walker turned to the Australian public and launched a nationwide competition to find a name for his new food. The prize pool held a very tempting fifty pounds for the winner or winners. Unfortunately the result of the competition is lost in the mists of time except for one thing, the name that was selected. It was Vegemite.

Success was slow in coming as Vegemite battled the entrenched imported brand, Marmite. Eventually, with the help of the coupon redemption campaign, Australians were persuaded to try Vegemite and began to buy it. Australia's own concentrated yeast spread was on its way to the astounding success it has since enjoyed.

Just before the outbreak of the Second World War, Vegemite gained official endorsement from the British Medical Association. It could now be advertised in the Australian Medical Journal, and doctors were increasingly recommending it to their patients as a nutritionally balanced food.

But the path to success was not entirely





smooth. During the War, supplies of Vegemite to civilians were rationed as the Armed Forces bought it in seven pound (3.2kg) containers as well as smaller packages. It was supplied to the troops for its nutritional value. Kraft Walker made the most of this. The company kept its customers informed of the reasons for the Vegemite shortage, and gained immeasurable goodwill for the product over the war years.

During the post-war "baby boom" that goodwill translated into a boom in Vegemite sales. In 1950, Vegemite came under the Kraft Foods Limited umbrella, and the company has made a point of consistently reinforcing the food value and "Australian-ness" of Vegemite.

Soon after that, the song which was to secure forever Vegemite's place in the Australian heart was introduced. This was the "Happy Little Vegemites" song, a delightful, toe-tapping little tune which has since seen service in many advertising campaigns on radio and television.

### THE PRODUCT

Essentially the original Vegemite Concentrated Yeast Extract recipe devised by Dr Cyril Callister in 1922 remains virtually unchanged. It uses saccharomyces (bakers' or brewers') yeast which is put through a process called autolysis. Yeast proteins are broken down and passed through the cell walls to form a liquid with all the vitamins, practically all the minerals and about 80 per cent of the proteins of the original yeast.

The liquid is then concentrated into the familiar thick, dark paste which is blended with other yeast extracts and natural flavours like celery and onion. The result is rich in B complex vitamins (essential in the body's use of proteins, carbohydrates and fats), protein and minerals.

### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Nineteen ninety-seven is a very special year for Vegemite and Australia. It is the 75th Birthday of the nation's favourite spread. One measure of the way in which Vegemite has become identified with Australia is the tongue-in-cheek proposal of its label as the new national flag! Many special events have been devised to mark this happy anniversary, including the Happy Little Vegemites Awards, a competition for school children which offers an opportunity for Australia's primary school-age students to use their creativity and talents to win substantial cash prizes for their

school. The prizes are to be spent on educational materials. Vegemite is saying "thank you" to Australia, and giving something back to the community.

The company has moved to reinforce family values for Vegemite via television advertising and through the use of the original "puts a rose in every cheek" imagery. These emphasise the importance of Vegemite in the growth and development of happy and healthy children.

### PROMOTION

The first promotion for Vegemite ran even before the product was Vegemite. It was the national competition to create a name for Dr Cyril Callister's concentrated yeast spread. The renaming to Parwill was less than effective. But Fred Walker had faith in his black Australian paste.

The 1935 campaign which finally launched Vegemite saw redemption coupons included in the company's blue packs of processed cheddar cheese. Created by J. Walter Thompson, the campaign ran for two years and was highly effective.

Two years later an intriguing poetry competition built on that success and once again catapulted Vegemite into the national spotlight.

This time its success was at least partly due to the substantial prizes: imported Pontiac cars. Entries flooded in and sales multiplied.

An inspired wartime campaign made a virtue out of the enforced scarcity of Vegemite; Kraft Walker's advertisements announced: "Vegemite fights with the men up north! If you are one of those who don't need Vegemite medicinally, then thousands of invalids are asking you to deny yourself of it for the time being."

This campaign was a huge success, but the company did not rest on its laurels. Immediately after the

War, Disney characters were enlisted to make sure Vegemite was palatable to children. Meanwhile, "Sister MacDonald" with "years of infant welfare experience" insisted that "Vegemite is most essential" in Women's Weekly advertisements. The healthy Vegemite Children began to appear in advertising, and were immortalised in the "Happy Little Vegemites" song in 1954.

As the baby boomers grew a little older, Vegemite followed them. Advertisements began to stress the importance of the B complex vitamins to the whole family, regardless of age. This was reinforced by the "Three Ages of Man" advertisements, which were soon joined by the



very successful "Pass the Vegemite, Mum" campaign. In the mid-seventies the Happy Little Vegemites returned, in tune with the growing nostalgia of the times.

In 1980, the company moved to consolidate Vegemite's position with teenagers and young adults by having the product endorsed by three famous and appropriately diverse Australians. Racing driver Peter Brock, tennis legend Ken Rosewall and award-winning actor Helen Morse all acknowledged their love of the black yeast spread. Eventually, the Happy Little Vegemites made yet another return - this time in colourised versions of their original television advertisements.

One recent promotion is the Vegemite Breakfast Campaign. It targets the most popular occasion for serving Vegemite, namely breakfast. Using radio, transit, outdoor and press media it conveys the message that Vegemite is a great start to the day.

### BRAND VALUES

Vegemite is an Australian icon, a piece of Australia's heritage. The nutritious black spread has become a key part of growing up in this country for just about every child. It is an acknowledged ingredient in the family diet, and is appropriately represented by happy, healthy and well-nourished children.



### Things you didn't know about Vegemite

- When Australians spread something on their bread it is Vegemite on one occasion out of every three.
- Vegemite can also be bought packaged with a cheese slice in the form of "Vegemite Singles".
- For a few years Vegemite was known as "Parwill", in a misguided attempt to pun on its main competitor's name: "If Marmite... then Parwill." The pun didn't sell the product.
- During the Second World War, civilians were reminded that invalids in the Armed Forces needed Vegemite more than they did. They were asked to abstain from Vegemite unless they needed it for medicinal reasons.
- Sydney's famous Powerhouse Museum staged a Vegemite Exhibition in 1991, coinciding with the July school holidays.
- The amount of salt in a typical spread of Vegemite is 112mg, less than the salt in the slice of bread!
- Vegemite celebrated its 75th birthday on 12 October 1997. Seventy-five years on, Australians are still 'Happy Little Vegemites' with eight out of ten Australian pantries housing a jar of Australia's favourite spread.

