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Welcome to the third VN newsletter aimed at providing our supporters and funders with an update on continued progress and developments within VN in the last six months and our future plans.
PROGRESS REPORT: MALAWI

Having obtained local UNICEF certification for our Malawi manufacturing facility, orders have rapidly increased and in the last quarter, we have sold more than double the amount sold in the same quarter last year. This scale up has been facilitated by the completion of Phase 1 of a production capacity expansion project, generously funded by Gorta as announced in the last newsletter. Phase 2 of this project is in progress and, with the related equipment shortly due to arrive in Malawi, the production capacity of the factory will more than double by the end of August.

In support of this expansion, some major organisational changes have been put in place involving the creation of some new roles and related recruitment, restructuring of the existing organisation and appointment of an experienced Factory Manager who started at the beginning of July and will be a key member of the Malawi Senior Management Team.

VN Malawi are working towards international UNICEF certification and a visit from the Inspection Team is scheduled for late Q3.

PROGRESS REPORT: KENYA

VN’s collaborator in East Africa, Kenya-based Insta Products, are already producing small quantities of RUTF for trials of four new recipes as part of VN’s Research and Product Development Programme. The new factory is in the process of being commissioned and, following UNICEF certification, are expected to be in full RUTF commercial production by September. Plans going forward include the appointment of a VN Sales and Marketing Manager for the East Africa region to be based in Nairobi.

PROGRESS REPORT: OTHER COUNTRIES

In Ethiopia, negotiations and the final legal documentation for the local production of RUTF have been completed between VN, Insta and a local food manufacturing company called Valsek. Good progress has been made in establishing the factory, ordering equipment and recruiting staff and we are on track to start production in the last quarter of 2009. In Zambia, we are supplying local customers including Catholic Relief Services sourced from imports from the Malawi factory. In Uganda, in conjunction with Insta, negotiations with a third party manufacturer are underway to establish an RUTF factory.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Solid progress has been made in the Research and Product Development Programme, funded by Irish Aid. Efficacy trials on four of the four new recipes started in July, with a third trial due to start next month. These randomised controlled trials comparing the efficacy of the new ready-to-use food formulations with the standard peanut milk recipe RUTF are being conducted in collaboration with well established international and local research institutions and involve large numbers of children.

APPENDMENTS

Claire Martin, VN’s Administration Manager, who has been working for VN since its incorporation is leaving to have her first child. Claire has made a really significant contribution to the business through her excellent organisational and communication skills, her dedication and hard work and her untiring ability to take on new business activities and challenges. Claire will be sadly missed by VN who are most grateful for her important contribution to the business. Congratulations and every best wish to Claire and Steve for the forthcoming major event.

Claire is being replaced by Mary Boyle. Mary comes to VN with experience of working in a large multi-national and more recent experience of leading the successful establishment of a POBAL funded community child care centre project. Her strong administrative background will help to support and drive forward VN in the challenges that it faces.

We are also pleased to welcome Philip Halpenny who joins the VN Executive Committee. Philip, who is a chartered accountant by profession, was for many years Company Secretary of Fyffes, one of the largest tropical produce importers and distributors in Europe, until his appointment as Finance Director of Blackrock International Land plc, a property company separated out from the Fyffes entity.

To date, VN’s accounting operations have been managed by our sister company Valid International, as part of a shared back office and for this support we are very grateful to the team in Oxford. However, final arrangements are in progress to relocate and fully establish the entire finance function in Ireland.

VN’S DVD

In the last newsletter, we explained that a full length documentary, funded by Concern and Irish Aid to celebrate the success of CTC, was aired on Irish television earlier this year. We have now finalised a short (12 minute) DVD about VN created using footage from this documentary and explaining our business model. This DVD is now being circulated and is available to view on our website at www.validnutrition.org.
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