

The Story of Vegemite

The story of how Vegemite was invented began in 1922 with the Fred Walker Company. They wanted to create a spread from one of the world's richest known sources of Vitamin B. The company, which was later known as the Kraft Food



Company, hired a chemist known as Dr Cyril P. Callister. It was he who developed the spread, using leftover brewers' yeast extract and various vegetable and spice additives.

The Fred Walker Company came up with the very clever idea of having the public name the spread themselves. They launched a competition right across Australia, and in 1923 the winning entry was announced. 'Vegemite' was to be its name! By the end of 1923, jars of Vegemite were being sold all over the country.

Unfortunately, a similar product from England known as 'Marmite' was already very popular in Australia. Shoppers weren't keen to try something different and Vegemite sales dropped. They decided to call it a different name to try to convince people to buy it. It became known as 'Parwill', with a clever catchphrase to go with it: "If Marmite...then Parwill"! Even with this new strategy, sales did not improve.

It took the Fred Walker Company 14 years to change Vegemite back to its original name before the people of Australia would embrace it. Doctors began recommending it as a rich source of Vitamin B and during the Second World War, the armed

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forces were buying it to send to the soldiers. It became so popular that it even had to be rationed, as the company couldn't meet demands.

Another clever advertising tool that was used was the creation of the song 'Happy Little Vegemites', which was released on the radio in 1954. It became a television commercial two years later and was aired right through the 1960s. Even today, the song is easily recognised, with Vegemite putting 'a rose in every cheek'.

Vegemite has gone on to become a food source that is loved

by Australians of all different ages, at any time of the day. Twenty-two million jars are sold every year. It has a thick and sticky consistency and is almost black in colour. Being one of the richest known sources of Vitamin B, it is very salty. Australians are used to the flavour, as they grow up eating it. When travelling overseas, some people even take it with them as a small reminder of home. However, adults who try it for the first time say that it is something that takes a little getting used to!

Questions

1. The Fred Walker Company went on to be known as what?

2. Who developed the recipe for Vegemite?

3. What were the ingredients for Vegemite?

4. What was the name of the song sung in the advertisement about Vegemite?

5. What year was Vegemite being sold for the first time?

6. What was the name of the product that was very similar to Vegemite?

7. What happened after the company couldn't meet demands of the spread?

8. Why is Vegemite good for you?

9. Name the two very important groups who supported the buying of Vegemite.

10. Have you ever tried Vegemite? If so, what was it like? If not, does this text make it sound good?
