FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

How changing your pepper brand can feed thousands…

Burnaby, British Columbia – April 16, 2020

This Greater Vancouver Food Bank posted this on Facebook: “…we are in urgent need of your help”. This call for help is echoed across the province, throughout the country and around the world.

The Union Protein Project (UPP) in partnership with the 50 Million Meals Campaign offers a simple and safe way to help. During the COVID-19 crisis when a consumer buys Fair Trade Kampot Pepper, the best pepper in the world, at www.proteinproject.ca, 50% of the purchase goes to buy much needed protein for food banks.

Scott Lunny, President of the UPP said, “Through our charitable project, donations from labour unions and their members are leveraged to subsidize high-cost protein so that food banks can afford it for their clients.”

Last year UPP provided almost one million dollars worth of much needed protein to food banks for about twenty cents on the dollar. Through partnerships with producers and Overwaitea Foods, UPP is able to deliver tuna, peanut butter and salmon to food banks throughout BC and into Alberta and the Yukon.

Kampot Pepper holds the prestigious PGI certification (Protected Geographical Indication) putting it on the same footing as other appellations of origin like Champagne, Cognac and Darjeeling Tea.

Joseph MacLean, creator of the 50 Million Meals Campaign explained, “Social purpose distribution of Fair Trade Kampot Pepper not only helps local Food Banks but is also helping small pepper farmers rebuild after the devastation of the Cambodian Genocide.”

Kampot Pepper has long been known as the best pepper in the world. In 1960 the region produced 3000 tons of pepper but their ancient farming system was all but destroyed when Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge made it punishable by death to grow pepper. Although Pol Pot was removed from power in 1979 the rebels were only finally ousted in 1999. In 2000 two tons of pepper was produced, last year 75 tons. They are rebuilding but need Fair Trade access to Western markets.

“Another issue that Fair Trade social purchasing addresses…” Joseph continued, “…is that the small growers are losing ground to the large, mostly foreign owned growers that are no longer buying the pepper but buying the farms. Last year almost one quarter of the smallest growers either lost or sold their farms or abandoned the business because they cannot sell their pepper.” Denis D. Gray in the Associated Press wrote:

A nearby sea, flanking mountains, a quartz-rich soil: It's the perfect spot on earth, devotees say, to yield a product they describe in that rapturous vocabulary usually reserved for fine wines: "aristocratic, virile, almost aphrodisiacal," with subtle notes of caramel, gingerbread and mild tobacco.

Celebrity chefs from Paris to Los Angeles swear by Kampot pepper, a southwestern Cambodian spice with a tragic past that is now reclaiming its global pre-eminence. It is also proving to be "black gold" for some of its once-impoverished farmers, thanks in part to Kampot pepper last year being awarded a Protected Geographical Indication by the European Union. This identifies unique products -- like Stilton cheese, Champagne or Darjeeling tea -- as originating in a very specific region.

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Back to the Grinder

By Brendan Brady  
Monday, Jan. 16, 2012

There's pepper and then there's Cambodia's Kampot pepper. You might think that the stuff that comes out of shakers and grinders is pretty much the same wherever you go, but to increasing numbers of chefs, restaurateurs and foodies, ordinary pepper bears as much resemblance to Kampot pepper as vin de table does to fine Bordeaux. They say that the delicacy and sweetness of Kampot pepper put it in a class of its own. "It's got a floral dimension that's really something special," says food-and-travel-show host Anthony Bourdain. In New York City, Michael Laikonsis, executive pastry chef at the famed Le Bernardin restaurant, says Kampot pepper has "a certain sweetness to it rather than straightforward heat." Laikonsis has used it to flavor everything from ice cream to goat-cheese mousse.

This newfound appreciation is great news to producers like Nguon Lay, head of the Kampot Pepper Farmers' Association. Nguon Lay's family has raised pepper vines on Cambodia's southern coast since the crop's early to mid-20th century heyday, when vast quantities of Kampot pepper were shipped to the pantries of Europe.

As with every other enterprise in Cambodia, production of the white, red and black berries collapsed in the late 1970s, under the ruinous rule of the Maoist-inspired Khmer Rouge. Nguon Lay was forced into a rural collective. Pepper farms were destroyed or haphazardly converted into rice fields. When the Khmer Rouge fell from political power, Nguon Lay's travails still weren't over. He became a soldier in the campaign to eradicate militias remaining loyal to the genocidal regime. Only by the 1990s, with the Khmer Rouge insurgency finally contained, were Nguon Lay and many of his neighbors at last free to "return to doing what generations before me did, to what we know best" — farming "the world's best pepper."

The origins of commercial pepper cultivation in Cambodia lie in the late 19th century turmoil gripping nearby Aceh, part of today's Indonesia. So prolific were Aceh's vast pepper fields — then producing, by some estimates, over half of the world's supply — that its sultans ordered the destruction of vines in an attempt to ward off foreign powers greedily eyeing the immense riches the crop was generating. Cambodian producers were not only able to fill the gap in the market caused by these drastic policies, they did so with a pepper that astonished gourmmands with its flavor. By the early 1900s, they were exporting millions of kilograms annually.

One of the reasons why Kampot pepper is so delicious is the local climate. The ingredient is only produced in half a dozen districts of the Cambodian provinces of Kampot and Kep, and it is the first Cambodian product to enjoy the E.U.'s protected geographical status, which certifies the origin of regional foods. Nestled between mountains and the sea, the local area's pepper-perfect microclimate offers mineral-rich soil and frequent rainfall. Traditional farming methods — knowledge of which, thankfully, survived the horror of the Khmer Rouge years — do the rest. "The techniques have passed down," Nguon Lay explains, "learned from children watching their parents."

The dogged determination to revive a once threatened crop is now starting to pay dividends. "It has a lot of cachet, something from the past," says Bourdain. A full renaissance is a long way off. Cambodia exported only a few thousand kilograms last year. But awareness is growing fast, and as Laikonsis points out, Kampot pepper offers that all-important element of romance. "It has been rescued from time and events," he says. "Ingredients that tell a story are a special thing you can offer people."
Cambodia’s Kampot pepper wins coveted EU protection

Sopheng Cheng, The Associated Press
Published Wednesday, March 2, 2016 3:37AM EST

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia – Cambodia’s Kampot pepper, a go-to spice for chefs around the world, has joined an elite group of gourmet food items whose names are protected by the European Union, joining products such as Gruyere cheese from France and Parma ham from Italy.

The coveted designation, known as Protected Geographical Indication, or PGI, works like a trademark protection that certifies the origin of regional foods. It means that any product sold in EU countries calling itself “Kampot pepper” must come from a designated region in southern Cambodia that includes Kampot and neighbouring Kep province.

The recognition was awarded to Kampot pepper on Feb. 18, making it the first Cambodian product to receive the label, the EU office in Cambodia said in a statement this week.

The peppers, which come in white, red and black, are described by gourmet chefs as having a complex flavour with floral overtones. Cambodian farmers from the seaside region on the Gulf of Thailand say the area’s microclimate and mineral-rich soil give the pepper its unique taste.

In 2010, Cambodia’s Commerce Ministry took a first step toward protecting Kampot pepper by giving it a domestically issued geographical indication status. The government applied to the EU in 2014 to expand the status to the European bloc.

“It is the first Cambodian product to receive this status in the EU, a single market of more than 500 million consumers and 28 countries,” Alain Vandersmissen, charge d’affaires of the EU’s delegation to Cambodia, said in an email.

“From now on, (Kampot pepper) will benefit from a very high level of protection on the EU market,” he said.

The pepper is also known in Khmer as Mrech Kampot and in French as Poivre de Kampot.

Nguyen Lay, president of the Kampot Pepper Promotion Association, sees the PGI designation as a seal of quality that will boost sales of the spice, which is currently grown by 342 families on 184 hectares (455 acres) of land in Kampot and tiny Kep province.

In 2015, the region produced 60 tons of Kampot pepper, of which 70 per cent was exported, mostly to the EU, the United States and Japan.

“We are delighted that our production has finally been recognized by the world’s biggest market, the EU,” Nguyen Lay said. “The status will help improve our living standard as more and more customers become impressed with our Kampot pepper.”

Associated Press writer Jocelyn Gecker in Bangkok contributed to this report.
The colonial-era French – captivated by its complex, distinct flavour – once exported pepper grown in Kampot by the tonne. Shipments of the spice, prized as the world’s best, continued until the 1970s, when production was suddenly wiped out. Forty years later, the fabled spice most thought lost to the culinary world is making a dramatic comeback. Robert Carry reports. Photography by Charles Fox.

“The Khmer Rouge just wanted to grow rice,” says pepper producer Anna Him, owner of Starling Farm in Kampot province. “They destroyed all the pepper plants, but we found some still growing in the wild. There were very few left, but we replanted them.”

The earliest accounts of pepper production in Cambodia come from Chinese diplomats who visited the Angkorian Empire almost a millennium ago. It later came to the attention of the West in the 19th century, when French colonists identified it as a
key export commodity. At the height of its power, only pepper grown in the Kampot region was seen as good enough to grace the tables of the French empire’s finest restaurants.

The spice remained a key ingredient in French cuisine until the 1970s – when disaster struck. With much of Cambodia’s population pushed to the edge of starvation on collectivised rice farms under the Khmer Rouge regime of 1975 to 1979, there was no room for a luxury like pepper.

When the Khmer Rouge was finally driven from power, pepper production was long gone and many of those with knowledge of how to farm the spice had died. However, as peace bedded in, Kampot pepper was about to make an unlikely comeback.

In 2002, Anna Him began clearing the land that would become Starling Farm – now the largest pepper producer in Kampot. “We started with nothing. We had a few wild plants we found and we got a few others from farmers in the area who had also just started growing pepper again,” says the businesswoman.

Crucially, some of the expert pepper farmers – men and women who had knowledge of the ancient growing methods – had survived. “There were still some people living in the area who knew how to grow pepper. Farmers from before the Khmer Rouge years,” she says. “They had some experience that they could share with the other farmers who wanted to start growing pepper again.”

In order to safeguard their knowledge of production methods, the farmers founded a pepper growers’ association and today, after a decade of painstaking work, Kampot pepper is again coming to the attention of the world.

Producers are struggling to meet demand for exports, with increasing prices giving those involved in production a good living. According to local reports, cultivated pepper plants now cover more than 90 hectares of land, up from 32 hectares prior to 2013.
Characteristics of different types of Kampot Pepper (Piper Nigrum)

**Green Pepper** can be harvested at anytime and is used as an accent for many foods in Cambodian cuisine. The green fruit has a fresh citrus flavour and is less spicy than the dried varieties.

**Black pepper** is harvested once some of the fruit begins to ripen (turn red). The green fruit is hand picked, sun-dried for two to four days and then hand-sorted by size. Black pepper has a deep, strong and slightly floral flavour with hints of eucalyptus and mint. It can range from mildly sweet to very spicy.

**Red pepper.** The ripened red fruit is left on the vine for an additional four months before being harvested, dried and hand sorted. Red pepper is sweeter and less spicy than the black but its flavour is more rounded, delivering a powerful fruity aroma.

**White pepper** comes from dried red peppercorns. The fruit is soaked in brine for five minutes and sundried. The outer skin is rubbed off by hand to reveal the white inner core. This is the most delicate of peppers and carries notes of fresh herbs and lime. White pepper is used in French pastry and has even been used to make ice cream.

**Tuk Meric - Cambodian Lime and Black Pepper Dipping Sauce**

One of the most simple yet delicious and versatile sauces. It is nothing more than fresh lime juice blended with ground Kampot pepper with a bit of sugar and salt. (Prep time: 5 minutes)

**Ingredients**
- 2 teaspoons freshly ground Kampot Pepper (black, red or white depending on your dish)
- ½ teaspoons salt
- ½ teaspoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons freshly squeezed lime juice

**Instructions**
1. Mix the four ingredients in a small shallow dish and use as desired.

**Author’s note:** I have made a number of variations using Tuk Meric as the base. I was once preparing a pork tenderloin dish for friends and had an extra apple on the counter. I thought, hmm; why not make some applesauce. I put them together and it was one of those OMG moments. Try it with wild salmon. Crush fresh blueberries and mango (purée if you want a smooth texture) and mix into the Tux Meric. It is just delicious.
BENEFITS of FAIR TRADE KAMPOT PEPPER

POVERTY REDUCTION
70% of the Kampot region lives in poverty. A Fair Trade distribution network will reduce poverty by increasing the farmers’ standard of living.

REDUCE CHILD LABOUR
In Cambodia due to challenges in accessing basic education and the absence of a compulsory education requirement, children are vulnerable to involvement in the worst forms of child labour...

IMPROVED DENTAL & GENERAL HEALTH
Children living in poverty when they have access to education have poor outcomes due to systemic health issues and chronic undernourishment, intestinal parasites and tooth decay are rampant.

REDUCE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
A report by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) stated that: “...domestic violence in Cambodia is linked to poverty and lack of education and is particularly high in the countryside where literacy rates are low.”

PROSPERITY & HOPE
In 1999 the Khmer Rouge rebels were finally ousted and the pepper farmers began to rebuild. With a Fair Trade distribution network the region can achieve a sustainable income, educate their children and look to a future of hope.
Virtuous Circle

Help Farmers
Feed Kids

Reduce
Food Insecurity

Fair Trade
Community Distribution
Sustainable Small Grower Agriculture

Vicious Cycle

Small Growers Sell Farms
Small Grower Oversupply
Foreign Growers Dominate

Virtuous Cycle

Sustainable Small Grower Agriculture
Small Growers Can’t get to market
Reduce Food Insecurity

Help Farmers Feed Kids

Fair Trade
Community Distribution