

OLUKEMI ATIJOSAN

Managing Director & Food Consultant, Eagle Solutions Services (Avarah Flour)



An enthusiastic entrepreneur who has taken a staple food and made it international by providing an alternative gluten-free product with health benefits to gluten intolerant and coeliac disease sufferers. The product has also received favourable feedback from the diabetic community.

Please tell me about your product?

“It’s called *Avarah Flour*. It is made from cassava and has been developed so it can be used to bake cookies, cakes and use as an ingredient in various recipes such as pancakes, waffles, , fish/poultry/meat/vegetable coating, as a thickener in sauces and also to be eaten like *fufu* as in the Africans diet. The product is suitable for people who are gluten intolerant and people who suffer from coeliac disease and has already received The UK Coeliac Society licence. Over the time that we have been producing

the product, the diabetics have been coming back and saying, '*thank you very much*' and that is why I have the confidence to say, '*diabetics rejoice*' because we have had many that have been coming back and saying that when they eat the product, it does not spike their blood sugar levels."

What inspired you?

"Originally, I was looking for something to be able to make cakes for children in schools who are gluten intolerant. I grew up in an area in Nigeria where cassava is our staple food. When you talk of cassava, people turn up their noses; it can be very frowned upon. But now cassava has become this international product that is going to be mainstream and [used in] producing various foods. I am constantly developing recipes and those who are buying are also trying different things and sending me their recipes. People are very excited about the product."

Where are you selling the product?

"We are developing the online market via our website www.jolamy.com. and on social media. [We] already have about four large wholesale African shops and also one of the big Asian companies asking about the product so we are going to be meeting with them very soon to conclude arrangements. Also, a bakery in the Republic of Ireland [bought] 5 tonnes of Avarah flour to develop products for Australia and Canada. So we will be reconnecting with them to follow up on progress. The plan is now to make Avarah flour not only for people who eat it as *fufu* but to ensure that the international community is aware of the product and embrace its versatility as part of their everyday diet.. Not only that, it is the only cassava product that diabetics have embraced as helping them to manage their condition without fear of spiking their blood sugar and of course its gluten free and mono-ingredient with nothing added to it; no additives, no preservatives, no colouring – that is it, in its natural state."

The product is also environmentally friendly in that when we process, nothing gets wasted; the peel of the cassava is used to fire during the drying process and what is left is used as animal feed – so it is a complete use of the product, a complete recycle

What has been the greatest challenge so far?

"Finance. Raising funds. We have put everything into it. When we started, we didn't envisage it would cost so much to develop the product to where it is now. I have even exhausted my pension money to make it happen. But I am happy because of the

impact that it is making on the farmers [and] the local women. I have set up a charity organisation (EMAKAFO) in Nigeria where the women grow the cassava and we buy the cassava from them so they have a ready market.”

What about the highlights?

“That whole package of what it is doing, what impact it is having; to the local women, the farmers, the community - has been so important. The women phone me up, I am based in London and they pray. Sometimes I am thinking, *‘where do you get the money to spend on the phone to me, to spend this long praying’* and this is because of what it is doing in their lives and that makes me very happy.”

What next?

“The original recipe is a traditional recipe called “Pupuru” but the food will only last a day and could not be used for baking or as an ingredient in other recipes. We have now taken that traditional recipe, innovate and refine the process making Avarah flour so it can keep for up to three years and made versatile to be used widely in many recipes. Also, to continue to market so we can make [Avarah] an internationally recognised and acclaimed product to be used in food preparation and developed for industrial use.”