

Edinburgh company shortlisted for award

✘ A Scots businessman has invented a food warning label designed to protect health, reduce waste and save money which has been shortlisted for a prestigious award.

The UWI Label was developed by its inventor in conjunction with scientists from Heriot-Watt University over the past 18 months. The label reacts as soon as a jar or other food packaging is opened, and gives a clear and simple visual warning when the product is no longer safe to consume.

Inventor Pete Higgins was inspired after he almost served out-of-date mayonnaise – which can cause chronic sickness and diarrhoea – to his young son.

Now he hopes the global potential of his invention will help it win an X-Factor style public vote and claim a £50,000 innovation prize to help complete development of the warning system.

Here is a film showing how it works:-

Higgins said:- “Everyone who sees the UWI Label instantly understands it and asks why something like this doesn’t already exist.

“The reality is that it takes a substantial amount of money to get something like this off the drawing board and into mass production.

Higgins has self funded the development of this project to date. He said:- “I have had to make some serious financial sacrifices, including the sale of my cherished camper van but with the support of Heriot Watt University, we are tantalisingly close to our dream of seeing it on supermarket

shelves.

“I’m now looking for support from the Scottish public to help UWI Label win this prize, because it could be the final element in ensuring an entirely Scottish invention gets on to the global stage.”

Run by Barclays bank, the Take One Small Step competition is a UK-wide business award across nine regions of the country. In Scotland the UWI Label is competing against an innovative bee-keeping system and a new method of applying temporary repairs to leaking pipes.

Pete added:-“The other competitors are brilliant and I wish them the best of luck. However, I’m hoping the true, global potential of UWI Label will help us claim the prize.”

The whole team have painstakingly developed a system which is triggered as soon as packaging is opened and will then begin a countdown to show exactly when a product expires – with a display showing green while the product is safe to use or consume – replaced by a red warning when it is not.

By providing consumers with a foolproof method of checking ‘use within’ dates, Pete says the system offers more than just convenience for consumers.

He added:-“Across the world there is growing recognition that waste is a problem which must be tackled urgently – and food waste is a huge part of that.

“With the UWI Label we are not only giving consumers a foolproof way to ensure food is safe to eat, we are giving them a simple and reliable way to manage their food better to reduce waste.

“In the UK alone it is estimated we waste £11bn worth of food every year. As well as the cost to the environment, that costs every family in the country £680. The UWI Label could help

dramatically reduce that.”

The concept has already impressed judges in the Take One Small Step competition, who have shortlisted it alongside two other finalists for the £50,000 prize. If successful, the company anticipates that the UWI Label could be utilised on products on UK supermarket shelves by the end of 2012.

Beyond the obvious application for food productions, the technology is also suitable in other sectors where products have a critical shelf life once opened – including industrial glues and sealants, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, blood transfusion services and veterinary.

The label can also be used on bottles or containers of high value alcohol and spirits in order to prevent counterfeiting.

More information about the Barclay’s Take One Small Step award and how to vote for the UWI Label can be found [on the website](#)

Photo Lorenzo Dalberto/Deadline