

## **Plugging into the Global Community**

**Don Mercer**  
**Associate Professor, Food Science**  
**Kemptville Campus University of Guelph**

Four years ago, I contributed the first article to the “Kemptville Advance” in what was hoped would be a one or two year series of monthly write-ups pertaining to Food Science from a non-academic perspective. It was about “Food Science Training in Sub-Saharan Africa” – an area which still remains important to me.

Looking back at more than forty topics covered since then, it is amazing to see how many different aspects of food we have examined. One of my personal favourites was about smashing “Wint-O-Green Life Savers” ® with a hammer late at night on the concrete floor in our darkened garage to watch the sparks being emitted. This was due to the rapid input of energy forcing some electrons to a higher energy level within the sugar crystals that make up the hard candies. When the electrons returned to their original energy levels, they would release tiny bluish-green sparks of light.

Oddly enough, one of the first things that hit me in preparing the earlier articles was not having to use the stodgy third person singular impersonal pronoun “it”, with everything being passive instead of active, as required in most scientific writings. There is something inherently refreshing and liberating about being able to say, “We did this”, rather than, “It was found that.....”. These articles have provided the opportunity to just talk normally (at least I hope that’s the case).

Aside from the fun of doing some rather crazy things, it is quite striking to observe how incredibly small the world has become, along with the common interests that we share. This is especially true with respect to food.

For the past ten years, it has been my pleasure to work with the International Union of Food Science and Technology (IUFoST). Wondering if there might be an interest in these articles outside the Kemptville area, I sent a few samples to them and was greeted by a totally positive response. Soon, there was a quick link to “Food 101: 21 Stories and Ideas” on the [www.iufost.org](http://www.iufost.org) website. Later, six more stories were added. Then, five more were added, bringing the total to thirty-two as of March 2013.

In February 2012, “Mango World Magazine” picked up one of the stories about mango drying in Malawi and included it as a focus article in their on-line E-magazine. In February 2013, “The World of Food Science” E-magazine which is published by IUFoST out of Australia bundled three of the food drying stories into a focus article titled “Around the Table with Food Science: Food Drying 101”.

Earlier this year, I had something of a reverse experience. While sitting in a hotel room in Morogoro, Tanzania (west of Dar es Salaam), I submitted an article to the “Kemptville

Advance” one Monday evening. That Friday morning, while still in Africa, I saw it in print on the newspaper’s website. This might not be surprising to many of you in light of your own experiences with instant communication through e-mails and the like. However, it is definitely noteworthy considering that even a year or so ago, it was not all that easy to access the Internet from many places in rural Africa.

The overall impact of improved electronic communications within Africa is far more significant than may seem initially apparent. One of the major challenges in providing Food Science training to food industry workers in Sub-Saharan Africa has been reaching interested individuals spread throughout 48 countries, covering over twenty-five million square kilometres, populated by more than 800 million people. Seeing first-hand how Internet connectivity is increasing yearly helps strengthen our resolve to expand the range of Distance Education courses being offered and expand beyond our initial geographical boundaries of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Looking back, it is most gratifying and humbling to see how articles in our local Kemptville Advance have been leveraged to reach a much broader audience at the global level. Thank you so much.