Local Toronto company GoodWindWater is determined to put a new kitchen staple on your pantry shelf: red palm oil.

Red palm oil is a non-GMO, zero transfat, zero cholesterol cooking aid. As a food product with promising health benefits, red palm oil is an alternative to mainstream cooking oil, replacing olive, vegetable or canola oil in everyday cooking, baking and salad-making.

This beautifully hued oil is unmistakable—the orange-red color of the palm oil comes from the presence of natural chemical compounds in the palm fruitlets called carotenoids. Carotene, if you remember your grade-school science, is responsible for the orange color of many fruits and vegetables such as carrots, pumpkins, and sweet potatoes.

The healthiest component of the red palm oil is its concentration of beta-carotene—a form of vitamin A which helps build strong bones and teeth, supports night vision and helps maintain healthy skin.

With a product this enticing, it’s hard to believe that red palm oil isn’t already in every Canadian kitchen. So why the delay? “The [current] perception is that red palm oil is unsustainable and unhealthy,” said Tong Cheah, President of GoodWindWater. But that’s just not the case. In fact, both GoodWindWater’s supplier and parent company are certified as RSPO sustainable, a governing board established in 2004 to monitor the sustainable production of palm oil.

Consumer education became the crucial first step. GoodWindWater came to George Brown’s Food Innovation and Research Studio (FIRST) to help overcome these perceptions and pave the way for red palm oil to become a kitchen staple. GoodWindWater worked with food scientists Winnie Chiu and Moira Cockburn, culinary technician Candace Rambert and George Brown College students from various culinary programs. Students involved in this project included: Anna Van Osch, Catherine Mitchell, Alan Tayles, Sarah Wihby, Jean Niravong, Katrina O’Hara Johns, Patrick Gordon and Sandra Osojnik. The FIRST research team developed recipes using red palm oil in place of traditional cooking oils and after a round of tests and nutritional analysis, ten recipes were chosen for inclusion in a recipe booklet. This project was funded by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and the Ontario Centres of Excellence (OCE).

GoodWindWater hopes to use the recipes developed to promote the health benefits of red palm oil as well demonstrate the product’s wide range of cooking applications. Mr. Cheah is also working with FIRST on the nutritional labeling of the products. “The team was willing to go the extra mile to make every recipe a success.”

Next stop: pantry shelves across Canada.