

Sweet taste of success

A new facility in north Cornwall is an essential ingredient in the growth of a hand-made patisserie company.

Overview

When Trevor O'Shea and Mark Khan took over Patisserie Express in Devon, it was a tiny business selling mainly to the local tourist trade. Five years on, they're delivering a range of 140 fresh, hand-made desserts, gateaux, terrines, pastries and savouries to outlets across southern England. Trevor O'Shea is in no doubt that Cornwall has played a big part in the company's growth.

"When we bought the business, it was sending one van down to Cornwall a week, or sometimes even squeezing the deliveries into the back of a car," says Trevor. "But within three years, almost half of our business was in Cornwall and we'd outgrown our production facility." The company began looking around for another site, but had problems finding anywhere suitable near its original base. "We soon realised that north Cornwall made a lot of sense – and not just because our products sell so well in the county," Trevor explains. "For

one thing, the transport links are excellent, with the A30 giving rapid access to the M5. We also found that prices for business premises are very reasonable."

Perhaps even more important was the strongly positive image that food and drink from Cornwall has in the eyes of consumers and retailers. "Cornwall is developing a reputation as being somewhere people go to have a good food experience," Trevor says. "It's not just the influence of celebrities like Rick Stein and Jamie Oliver. People are increasingly interested in what goes into the food they eat, and Cornwall has quite rightly got a superb reputation for quality and freshness – which can only be good for a brand like ours. In fact, that's one reason why we decided to call ourselves the Cornish Patisserie!" As far as possible, the company sources its ingredients locally, including eggs, whipping cream and meat for its savoury products.



Workforce

The Cornish Patisserie's new facility in Launceston opened in early 2005 and employs 14 people. To begin with, staff from the original facility were brought down to work several days a week in Cornwall, as a way of making sure that products were produced to a standard quality. But the whole team in Launceston is now local, and Trevor says that the company is extremely happy with it: "Our head chef here has just done his Advanced Food Hygiene Certificate, and we've also just succeeded in getting a British Retail Consortium accreditation, which means that we're now able to sell to larger organisations such as the big supermarkets."

Technology

The Cornish Patisserie has an attractively designed website, which at present is – as Trevor puts it – essentially for window-shopping. But that's set to change, as he explains: "At the moment it's not much good someone going online to order a freshly made strawberry gateau, because what they'll end up with is a trifle! But longer-life products will make e-commerce a much more viable proposition, and we'll eventually be developing our website in that direction."

Clients

Most of the company's customers are in the south and southwest of England, including destination pubs, independent hotels and many of the more prestigious golf clubs and garden centres. They also include

high-profile venues such as the Windsor Castle Farm Shop, the Eden Project and the National Maritime Museum Cornwall. The Cornish Patisserie is now planning to extend its range, as Trevor explains:

"We're developing a new, branded range of 'ambient' products – still made with high-quality, fresh ingredients, but which don't need to be chilled or frozen. A longer shelf-life means that the distribution range is hugely increased, taking in London and places even further afield. This should also make us less reliant on the tourist industry, which by its nature has a seasonal aspect."

Support

A major advantage of locating in Cornwall was that the company's new production unit was eligible for a substantial amount of Objective One funding. Trevor says that membership of Taste of the West group, which supports food and drink businesses in the region, has also been very useful: "We've found that having a Cornish identity and being alongside other producers from Cornwall at exhibitions like the Speciality & Fine Food Fair and the International Food Exhibition in London has helped raise our profile. The South West Food & Drink group have also been helpful – they've got a marketing research development fund that we're starting to make use of in developing our new product range. And we've also very much appreciated the advice that we've had from Cornwall Pure Business – a service that I'd certainly recommend to other businesses thinking of locating down here."