

Turning cream into gold

From its origins in a farmhouse kitchen, Rodda's has grown into a company whose dairy products are acclaimed worldwide

Overview

For many people, the rich taste of clotted cream is the very essence of Cornish natural goodness. It's a treat that's been relished down here for at least 500 years, but it owes much of its fame in modern times to one firm: A. E. Rodda & Son of Scorrier. The Rodda family began making it in the late 1800s, 'scalding' milk over boiling water on the range in their farmhouse kitchen until the cream on its surface clotted, then leaving it to set in a cool larder overnight. They sold plenty locally, and it was not long before holidaymakers began to sample it along with their scones and strawberry jam. In 1924, Fanny, the wife of Alfred Rodda, heard a group of these bemoaning the fact that they couldn't take the 'Cornish gold' home with them, as it would go off. This set her thinking.

After various experiments, she discovered that by sterilising the cream and packing it into tightly sealed jars, it could be made to last as long as three months. The technique was patented and the stage set for a long-running Cornish success story.

Eighty years on, Rodda's old granite-built farmhouse overlooks an extensive modern facility that produces ten tonnes of clotted cream a day (don't ask how many calories that adds up to!). The company has also recently introduced an organic line and successfully extended its brand to butter, liquid cream, crème fraîche, and (in cooperation with three local companies) shortbread, fudge, and ready-to-eat cream teas. But they're all still made with only the finest milk from cows pastured on local farms - over 7000 of them in peak season.

Workforce

Although Rodda's now employs 80 people, it's still very much a family-run business. Eric Rodda, at 87, still plays an active role, along with his nephews Alfred and Philip Rodda and his sons-in-law John Pengelly and Roger Morriss. Alfred's sons Nick and Andrew are also directors at the firm.

Clients

Retail outlets include most of the major supermarket chains including Tesco, Asda, Sainsburys, Morrisons and Waitrose, as well as a host of smaller food retailers both in the UK and abroad. Rodda's clotted cream adds a touch of luxury to the menus of many top hotels and restaurants, and forms an indispensable part of the Cornish cream teas served to passengers on British Airways flights.

Technology

The technology used to produce clotted cream these days would have seemed like science fiction to earlier generations of Roddas, with special packing rooms and a heating process which produces an even purer product. In the automated production facility, cream is put into heat-resistant plastic containers, or stainless steel pans for bulk batches. After

cooking, it is cooled in a temperature-controlled cooling passage. The entire process takes place under the strictest hygiene conditions.

Other features of Rodda's operations also have a distinctly twenty-first century flavour. The company's website, designed by a Cornwall-based e-commerce specialist Futurestore Technologies, allows customers to order and pay for products with the click of a mouse.

Support

Rodda's has received some financial support for new facilities via Devon & Cornwall Business Link, and help with marketing from Cornwall Taste of the West. But managing partner Philip Rodda chuckles at the idea that Rodda's might need any incentives to stay in the county. "Cornwall's what we're all about, really" he says. "And Cornish clotted cream is like champagne. You simply can't make it anywhere else."