



Artisan food guide

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Artisan food enjoys taste of success



Caroline Murphy is the artisan producer behind West Cork Eggs.

This week's article is the first in a series of guides that will focus on the cross-cutting theme of food production

Artisan describes a food or drink that is made in a traditional manner using high-quality ingredients.

West Cork is a vibrant region boasting a multitude of quality artisan foods and businesses. In the next few articles we will highlight some of these businesses. We also encourage you to check out what artisan products are available in your region. This week, we will focus on one such artisan producer – West Cork Eggs and we spoke to businesswoman Caroline Murphy to learn more about this family-run enterprise.

Based outside Rosscarbery in west Cork, the business is family-run since 2013. Originally supplying one supermarket with eggs from their farm, their sales reach has increased significantly since joining SuperValu Food Academy in 2015.

What do you feel is the greatest challenge facing artisan food producers today?

There are many challenges facing us. I want to produce a good wholesome product that is exactly what it says on the box – a local, free-range, fresh egg. One challenge is the competition from larger producers who, due to scale, can produce my product for a cheaper price which can sway customers purchase choices. Another challenge is educating consumers: teaching them to value local, freshly produced products and the high quality of that product. Other challenges include legislation and staff retention.

How do you feel Brexit will affect your business?

I believe it will affect us all, but exactly how is still unknown. Raw materials, packaging and distribution are all going to be affected. We also may face tariffs which

will affect markets significantly.

However, it may also be a silver lining for some producers. If, for example, eggs from the UK sold here are going to be more expensive then it gives me a greater advantage and I believe there will be a big push to support local food producers because of Brexit.

What is your greatest business achievement so far?

My greatest achievement has been to grow a flock of four hens and growing a business from that providing a top-quality local product as well as supporting local jobs. I developed our brand and have grown this so our customers now trust what we say and share our values. We are also involved in the Food Cloud initiative, which helps to distribute excess food to those in need. Apart from my family, my business is my greatest achievement.

What supports did you receive to start or build your business?

When I started the business, I did not have all the skills I needed but I vowed to learn what I needed to do. Thankfully, there is a lot out there you can avail of. I reached out to my Local Enterprise Office which has a wealth of supports including mentoring, networking, financial supports and a plethora of courses. It really supports you throughout the journey.

Other supports include the local chamber of commerce, business associations and Enterprise Ireland. I am actively involved in Network Ireland which is a networking association supporting the professional and personal development of women.

Has your business won any local or national awards?

We have been very fortunate. In 2018, we became accredited by the Business All Stars and we won the Network Ireland National Award for Best Emerging Business. We also won a gold award at the Blás na hÉireann Food Awards and the Southern Star Best New Business Award.

How many people does your business employ?

At present, I work full-time in the business and have two part-time employees. My husband and children also support the day-to-day running of the business.

What advice would you have for people thinking of starting their own food business?

To those thinking of starting a food business I would say go for it. My first piece of advice is – research, research, research. Running a food business is hard work and many don't survive. Know your market and be passionate. I would also urge you to use the supports available to you, like your Local Enterprise Office and use your network. Most importantly, don't be afraid to ask for help.

How does your business embrace technology?

We use technology to help reduce the labour involved – for example, at the beginning, we hand-stamped all our eggs with the flock code and best before date whereas now we use a stamping machine.

We also use social media to share information about our products and to run competitions, etc, to raise brand awareness.

What do you love most about your business?

I love everything about my business. I love seeing our hens roaming in the field and love the taste of our fresh eggs. I also love getting to know our customers and getting their feedback. My business has allowed me to learn many new skills, meet so many new people and yet still be able to be at home for my kids. I love that eggs produced on our family farm are used in homes across the country to provide delicious quality dishes for the whole family.

What is the mission of your business?

To provide true West Cork Eggs, produced on our home farm to as many people as we can. We do this by treating our hens in the best way and, in return, they give us the best eggs.

How important is branding for your business?

Branding is important, but so is the qual-

Checklist

Student tips



As part of your agricultural science course, it may be a good idea to partake in some research projects involving some of the eight cross-cutting themes that permeate the four strands of study (ie scientific processes, soil, crops and animals). You can use the questions answered here to do your own investigations.

Teacher tips

➔ New specification: taking a topic such as artisan foods, which is a learning outcome from Strand 4 Animals, displays how the student can now learn in a non-linear student-centred approach using various stimuli. Throughout the next three articles we will highlight how, by developing a unit of knowledge around this learning outcome of artisan foods, the student can link in with many other learning outcomes in the new specifications.

ity of your product. If you have the best product but poor branding, no one will pick it off the supermarket shelf. Conversely, if you have great branding but a poor product they will pick it up once, but they will not buy it a second time. Your branding tells your customer about your product, your business and your story. It is so important to get it right. In the crowded marketplace you only have a few seconds for a customer to decide whether to buy your product or not.

Do you find legislation difficult?

Legislation is absolutely necessary but face your fears and do it. Find out what legislation is needed and keep on top of it regularly (make it part of your routine). If you let it build up, it becomes time consuming and may lead to penalties or consequences from the powers that be.

Is your product sourced from Ireland? Do you need any raw materials etc from other markets to produce your product?

Our eggs are all from our home farm here in west Cork.



NEXT WEEK

Food production – more on artisan foods