



THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY FOR THE CITY

Natures Country Gold
Case Study
March 2008
Interview with the Pohio family

Company on Sweet Trail to Success

The valleys and hills of the King Country are picturesque factory sites for a honey business promising to take its taste to the world.

Nature's Country Gold is a family run honey business recognising the enormous potential for New Zealand produced foods in markets hungry for pure, natural products.

Those hives with their populations of tireless bees represent a huge part of the company's investment and commitment to controlling their product from source to shelf.

It is not only the purity of Natures Country Gold that is fuelling its success, however.

The company has a unique blend of skills that provide a combination as inspiring as the flavours of its main honey types.

The Pohio family have combined a family propensity for hard work with the food processing skills of son Hayden, the apiary skills of father Adrian and the design eye of mother Lania to create a brand that is poised for local and international recognition.

As an ex-dairy farmer Adrian knew better than many the value of bees, and took on a job helping a neighbour with hives after selling his dairy farm. A two week job turned into two years, while Hayden was overseas working in food processing businesses in the UK.

Whilst travelling with Hayden in France, Adrian decided to buy his own hives. He was enraptured by the part community markets play in the lives of locals and could see the potential for a boutique honey brand back home.

Like many small food processing businesses today in New Zealand, the family attribute their initial success to the local farmers' market.

Combining some superb honey out of hives in the King Country with appealing packaging designed by Lania, the family sold out at their first stall at the Hamilton Farmers Market in 2005.

The market was a low cost outlet to go direct to their discerning market every weekend.

Meanwhile, back from his OE and tired of the politics that went with corporate businesses, Hayden decided to make the leap into the family business. He bought his own ideas that he felt would have more chance to be taken up within the smaller business.

“Pretty soon we started playing around with this idea for a muesli bar. It seemed everyone I spoke to never finished a muesli bar, and certainly never commented on how good one was, and I wanted to change that.”

Two years on and the bar’s trademark is about to be registered and is the company’s first corporate secret Hayden cannot disclose just yet – however he has had assurance from the Prime Minister herself that the bar is unparalleled for taste.

“Helen Clark was at a Te Puni Kokiri meeting, and she commented on how good it was in her speech. We sent her a box with a note – “to the Queen Bee, from one beehive to another!”

Hayden’s keen eye for publicity and passion to produce a quality product using honey puts him in a position most food technologists in large companies can only dream about.

While the trade name may be a secret, the ingredients are not.

“Unlike most muesli bars it is full of things people can recognise, like organic apricots, pumpkin seed kernels, cashew nuts, butter and of course 18% Manuka honey.”

With demand growing for the Manuka and Rewarewa honey, and the muesli bar to be launched, Hayden says he recognises the company is now at a critical point.

“The decisions are bigger, and the money spent is significantly more. Mum and Dad were on a trade mission to China, and we know how huge the potential is throughout Asia for honey products, however there is a lot of work to do before taking on any of it.”

He says attention to distribution channels, package sizing and product type are all factors that need time and focus before committing to large export markets.

He is looking forward to attending a workshop run through Opportunity Hamilton by advisor Roger Brady, on building export capabilities.

Roger says the challenge for small companies like Hayden’s when exporting is knowing how much can be safely taken on, without endangering relationships with existing customers here at home.

“It may even be a case of having to turn down a large order, and offer a small sample order just to stay in the picture.

“This is a far better option than promising more than you can deliver, endangering not only that relationship, but your existing customers and the financial health of your business.”

Hayden says part of the challenge in a growing business is knowing when to go looking for advice. Opportunity Hamilton has provided not only valuable courses, but a mentor for Nature’s Country Gold to help see the opportunities and pitfalls that lie ahead.

“They say even Tiger Woods has a coach because he cannot see his own swing, and business is just the same, you sometimes need someone to help you see what you should be doing,” says Hayden.