

# Rich pickings

The fruit ingredients sector is ripe for David Berryman, reports **Gary Scattergood**

**T**he fact that David Berryman is still around to celebrate its 25th anniversary this year in such rude health is no mean feat. As md Rachel Collins freely admits, in 2008 the beverage business almost fell off the edge of a cliff in the wake of the global economic downturn.

Speaking at the firm's Dunstable base, she doesn't pull any punches. "2008 was awful because we lost a lot of money in foreign exchange when the dollar dropped so much. Since then we've been climbing out of a deep hole by looking at what else we can do."

Back in 2008 the main thrust of the business was in juice trading – and selling to the likes of Britvic and Princes. But as the market consolidated, the competition got more intense and, set against the backdrop of the relentless march of global communications, the firm found its unique selling point becoming squeezed.

"Our niche used to be dealing with exporter companies in the country of origin, but now our customers can deal with them directly through sites like LinkedIn. There are no secrets anymore," Collins concedes.

The firm was also eternally at the mercy of the weather, with poor summers more often than not meaning sales to beverage customers plummeted as consumer demand dipped.

Fast-forward to 2013, however, and business for David Berryman is booming. And it is all because it has diversified its beverage offerings and focused far more on being an ingredients company too, simultaneously removing the pitfalls of relying on one sector while also tapping into soaring demand for fruit-based ingredients for desserts and ice creams.

"We are still very strong in our beverage trading and we don't want to lose that. But we are taking that heritage and reputation and transferring them to new customers and new markets," says Collins.

Since February demand from ice cream and dessert producers has gone through the roof, says Collins, not least because of the vast range of products it has in stock – the legacy of 25 years' worth of sourcing fruit from around the world for the beverage sector.

Now, it is supplying customers with everything from raspberry ripple to the more weird and wonderful combinations that are so in vogue with retailers and customers.

"We provide anything that is fruit based, so that's everything from mango fruit preps that sit as a layer in yogurts or cheesecakes, to products with fruit pieces in, and fruit ingredients for ice creams. These are often quite exotic flavours, such as star fruit and dragon fruit, right through to weird and wonderful combinations like lemon and liquorice or balsamic strawberry."

## SERVICE MENTALITY

So why does Collins think business has rocketed since the turn of the year?

In her opinion it's all about customer service and word of mouth. She suggests some of her bigger competitors might not be too interested in supplying 200 or 300kg lots of niche products to small outfits, whereas her firm definitely is.

What's more, it can do it quickly, too. "We're used to dealing with beverage companies that have quick turn-around times, so we've taken

that service mentality and applied it to these new markets," she says. "We had a customer who called us on a Friday, we made it and got a sample to them by the afternoon and delivered it all on the Monday. That's how quickly we can turn things around."

While the business is now benefitting from its efforts, don't be fooled into thinking this was an overnight success story. Since 2008, it tried several other strategies, including launching its own beverage products and taking on contract packaging, neither of which was especially successful. And moving into the ingredients sector hasn't always been plain sailing either – not least because the firm didn't take on any additional staff with a speciality in this field.

The ethos has been very much on trial and error – in fact, being prepared to fail appears to be something of a mantra – and in harnessing a sense of shared purpose and excitement for the project among the 24-strong team.

"It's been a deliberate extension but it has taken quite a long time to turn this ship around," says Collins. "Our customers are always really impressed with our range of fruits, but we've always had them in stock for our beverage customers, it's just they didn't know about us or what we could do."

As this knowledge continues to spread, Collins expects expansion to follow. Planning permission is already in place for an additional factory next to its existing site – something that will lead to additional jobs being created.

"We never expected it to take off like this, it has been amazing," she says.

Proof, if ever it was needed, that through adversity comes triumph. **FM**

Collins: 'We never expected it to take off like this'



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