

BEER MAT MENTORING MEETING NOTES

(16) Exporting

Now that your successful rural business is conquering the UK, how about export? This could be an area of profitable growth. And you get to see the world, to boot.

There are lots of good reasons to export. Despite everything, many parts of the world view the British brand very positively. British products are seen as high quality, innovative and trustworthy. Extending to new markets reduces risk, boosts local customer confidence and can create good PR as the media love positive business stories.

Tips from a success story

One of the inspirational stories at the 2017 Oxford Farming Conference was from Jack Hamilton of Mash Direct (mashdirect.com) in Northern Ireland. This family farm has been developing a niche in pre-packed chilled mashed potatoes and other vegetables and found that exporting to the Middle East then opened doors to the broader UK market.

Jack's top tips were:

- Attending trade shows is vital to explore, understand and connect with the main players in overseas markets
- Listen to what customers want
- Emphasise heritage and family stories
- Use accreditations (Red Tractor, BRC, Food Standards, etc.) to build trust
- Think about potential volumes – avoid creating a demand you cannot satisfy
- Use social media such as Twitter and Facebook to give information and advice and gain a following
- For food products, hand out free samples to get people talking about it
- Try to identify and avoid time wasters - people who try to sell you the world
- Don't try to go east and west at the same time if you want to get any sleep at night!

Know your market and other issues

Like most things exporting is mainly common sense, but bear in mind that not everyone approaches business with a Western mind set. So what seems sensible to us may be strange or offensive to others.

A good common sense approach to research a market is simply to call users of your product or service in the potential market(s). Ask where they obtain these products, what they think of this supplier, and what would be a better offering for them. Then explore with the most favoured local distributors.

For some products and services, selling online is a good option. Internationalise your website, use the local country suffix, arrange translations by native speakers, and check the colours and pictures are appropriate for the target market.

Do consider working with others. In Beer Mat Mentoring Meeting notes 15 I mentioned another inspiring OFC talk from Ali Capper, who worked with other hop growers to develop the overseas market from a commodity product to a premium "Brewed with British Hops" brand. Share the cost and increase impact.

Of course it's not all plain sailing but the Government are keen to help and at exportingisgreat.gov.uk there is a wealth of advice and support.

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