

Bringing Cool Beans to the UK

Our deal with Waitrose represents a major opportunity for our business

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Isolde Johnson, Sarah O'Connor



Sarah O'Connor and Isolde Johnson with their Cool Beans products, which is now being sold through Waitrose in the United Kingdom: 'The transition was greatly helped by the large number of Irish people living in the UK.'

As an Irish-based food company, the domestic market will always be of immense importance to us. However, we have known from the beginning that in order to reach our full potential we would inevitably have to focus on the export market. By increasing the volume of our Cool Beans product, we can achieve efficiencies that allow us to continue with competitive pricing and to survive in a market where margins can be incredibly tight.

Distributing Cool Beans further afield is not without challenges, particularly as our product doesn't contain any additives or preservatives. However, ensuring Cool Beans remains healthy and fresh has always been a key priority of ours and is something we are not willing to

compromise on. We have therefore prioritised managing the supply chain. Having been on sale in SuperValu since the start of the year, we commenced our export journey in November equipped with a lot of lessons learned from our experience in Ireland. So Cool Beans is now on sale in [Waitrose](#) across the United Kingdom, which is an incredibly exciting time for us.

After spending months trying to secure a buyer meeting in the UK, we prepared rigorously for our first meeting with Waitrose and travelled to the UK with bundles of energy (and a PowerPoint presentation) but the meeting didn't go according to plan. The product was very well received and they loved our brand.

However, Waitrose believed our 400g pots were too big – we were probably naive in our belief that bigger is better. Instead, they wanted us to recreate 300g pots, which is not as easy as it sounds as we now had an incredibly tight deadline of redesigning thousands of labels and pots.

Lucrative export opportunity

Waitrose also wanted a higher bean content (from 38 per cent to 48 per cent) and so we also had to redesign pretty much our whole manufacturing process in order to accommodate their request. We happily obliged, as this represented a major opportunity for our business.

A lucrative export opportunity and the steps involved in securing it sound very glamorous. However, ever conscious of our cash flow we knew we had to be as frugal as possible. Financially, we were not in a position to allocate resources to this very lucrative export opportunity and as our busy schedule with the Irish market did not ease, we had a major balancing act on our hands.

The transition was greatly helped by the large number of Irish people living in the UK and the online support from this community really took us by surprise – one of our [Facebook](#) posts reached approximately 50,000 people as a result.

We also availed of support on offer from Irish affiliated bodies and trade organisations such as Bord Bia, [Enterprise Ireland](#), the Irish International Business Network, the [Irish Exporters Association](#) and the British Irish Chamber of Commerce.

The export opportunity has come at a great time for our business and we have seized it with both hands. We believe it was first necessary to succeed in the Irish market before exposing ourselves to huge financial risk by exporting a product that had not been tried and tested. As we continue on this steep learning curve we have realised that smaller pots of Cool Beans are likely to be even more popular, so be sure to keep an eye out for these on the shelves in Ireland in the coming weeks.