

Deli Lites grows as a leading food market leader

The HM Homegrown Top 50 campaign showcases the leading employers within our SME sector which were founded and are still headquartered in Northern Ireland. In the third of the Homegrown Series with **Harbinson Mulholland**, we look at Deli Lites, a family-owned convenience food manufacturer based in Warrenpoint

Deli Lites is a market leader within the Irish food-to-go market and has been providing convenience food solutions for close to 25 years. In recent years, the business and brand has evolved to become much more than a fast-moving consumer goods manufacturer. Nowadays it is a truly purpose-driven brand, committed to giving back to communities and caring for our planet.

The first Deli Lites manufacturing location opened in Newry, Co Down in 1994 to a loyal customer base. Led by Jackie Reid and her husband Brian, Jackie saw an opportunity to make artisan sandwiches for convenience stores, schools and universities – so they bought a premises of their own and founded Deli Lites Ireland Ltd.

Starting with a modest 30 sandwiches per day, sales quickly grew and in just three years, demand for Deli Lites' products led to expanding their manufacturing capability – twice. A major deal for supplying Debenhams cafes throughout Ireland helped further establish a reputation for innovation and premium quality. Further contracts with Costa Coffee and Applegreen soon followed.

Still run by Jackie and Brian, and supported by an experienced senior management team, the company has an ever-increasing portfolio of customers, a workforce of approximately 250 employees – and are still growing. The firm has added a bakery facility and currently supply every county in Ireland every day of the week with an award-winning food-on-the-go product range including gourmet sandwiches, innovative wraps, and artisan salads.

However, the growth trajectory isn't showing



any signs of slowing down with the recent launch of Planet Café – a new heat to eat product range that Jackie and Brian believe will provide a genuine opportunity to scale their business globally.

Jackie credits hard work and determination for their success, alongside making the most of every opportunity, which in the last few years has seen them breaking into the GB market and several European countries.

She also attributes their family culture as being a key driver of their success. "In a family business you can move very quickly to address challenges and with loyal customer base, bringing them with you and working through issues together is crucial," she says.

Looking after their people is an important element of the business and as Jackie refers to

in the podcast. "When you've a good team on your side, you can do anything."

The HM Homegrown campaign highlights the significant contribution of SMEs, with this year's analysis showing over 10,500 people are employed by the Top 50 companies, 43 of which are family owned and 12 of whom are in the manufacturing sector. ■

You can listen to the Ulster Business Podcast on Spotify, Apple or Soundcloud and hear more about Deli Lites' plans for growth with new brands, and expansion into new markets

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