

Anne Marie Feighery – Feighery's Farm Beetroot Juice

In 2019, Anne Marie Feighery launched her innovative agri-food business, Feighery's Farm Beetroot Juice, which produces beetroot juice using pesticide-free beetroot grown by her father and brothers on their family farm on Co. Offaly.

Background

Anne Marie has always had a close connection to agriculture as she was raised on a tillage and vegetable farm in Co. Offaly.

"When you're growing up on a farm you can't avoid being involved in the jobs like sowing or picking, you would always be roped in".

Anne Marie went on to study science at university, then began working in the equine industry. While her education and professional life took her away from home, Anne Marie remained involved in the family farm which her father and two brothers run together. When the Feighery farm became heavily involved in vegetables in the 1990s, Anne Marie's father and brothers set up some local farmers markets to create additional income from their produce. Anne Marie became involved in the setup of one of these markets in Westmeath, which continued to keep her connected to the farm.

"I was living away for my job but I would go home at the weekends and be involved in the markets so there was always something bringing me back to the farm".



The Idea

The idea behind Anne Marie's agribusiness sprouted in 2018. Anne Marie actually credits her father with sparking the idea, as he had read an article explaining that beetroot juice can contribute to reducing blood pressure. When Anne Marie tried to find some beetroot juice for her father, she spotted a gap in the market.

"I couldn't find an Irish beetroot juice. I discovered pretty quickly that the majority of what was available to Irish customers was coming in from England, Germany, Switzerland, places like that".

This lack of an Irish grown beetroot juice came as a shock to Anne Marie, considering that beetroot was being grown around Ireland, including on her own family farm. She realised that this was a gap in the market with a potential to be filled.

The Process

Anne Marie had a feeling that an Irish grown beetroot juice had a place in the health food market and reached out to the Teagasc Food Research Centre in Moorepark to get another perspective on whether her idea was a viable one.

NRN Women in Agriculture Case Study

"I picked up the phone and called Moorepark and they thought there could be something in this. It rollercoasted really fast from there".

Anne Marie decided that she wanted to pursue this idea but it was now late in the summer of 2018 and she knew that she was running out of time to grow a larger beetroot crop. Anne Marie spoke to her father and they decided to sow some more beetroot and hope for the best.

"We said sure if it grows it grows and if it doesn't we can think about next year".

Luckily for Anne Marie, the beetroot crop grew. This spurred her into action. She began the process of product development and had the finished product of 10,000 bottles of beetroot juice ready to hit the shelves by March 2019.



Back to the Farm

In 2020, the business was ramping up and producing more juice. As she had a full time job and was running the business in her spare time, Anne Marie made the decision to leave her job and dedicate all of her time to the business. This decision brought her back to the farm and allowed her to become more involved in the day to day running of her business.

"Now I can dedicate all my time and energy to it and I'm just loving it, loving the fact that it brings me back home to the

farm and brings me back to my roots and to what my brothers and dad are doing on a day to day basis".

The beetroot juice is truly a family affair, as Anne Marie's brothers and father sow and maintain the beetroot on the family farm. The harvesters and machines that are already part of the farm are then used to prep the beetroot for pressing.

Anne Marie's innovative idea to make use of the resources already available to her when starting her business ensures that her raw materials are of a high standard, and also brings a new lease of life to a farm that has been running since 1957.

"The business has been a new bit of excitement on the farm. There's always something happening and loads going on behind the scenes".

The business has also helped to spark an interest in agriculture in the youngest members of the Feighery Family. Anne Marie has noticed that having an inside view into the business has been a source of excitement and inspiration for her nieces and nephews.

"It has been really good for my nieces and nephews because they're seeing the whole process at home and they have a huge interest. As it is they have their own little hens and sow their own leaves and they're under 10 so it's definitely helping to get them interested in farming".

Adding Value

As well as Anne Marie's innovation bringing excitement to the farm and encouraging an interest in agriculture in the younger generations, it has aided the viability of the farm. With many vegetable growers feeling pressure from large chains with lower price points, Anne Marie's business has been of huge benefit to the farm.

"It's not viable for a lot of people to farm vegetables so this business does add value to what we have at home and allows it to make sense for us to keep it all up".

The business has allowed the farm to sell a higher quality and get more value from their beetroot crop than they could before.

"The business is created from a vegetable that we wouldn't have sold a huge volume of before because the want for it as a vegetable is smaller relative to a potato or carrot crop".

Having seen the business add value to the farm, Anne Marie feels that further ideas and innovations can follow.

"It's very motivating for everyone that we're pulling it off and adding value to things at home. It's making us look at things differently and ask ourselves what can be done differently".

Lessons Learned

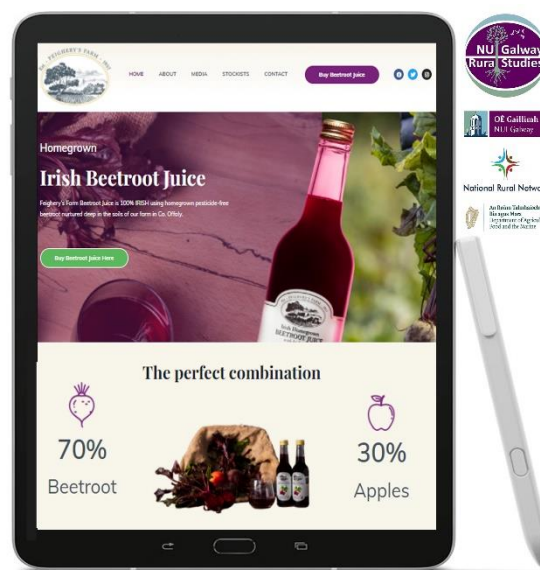
Anne Marie's experience as a woman in agriculture has been a positive one, and she feels that it is an exciting time to be a woman in the sector. Through networking with other women in agriculture in groups like the Accelerating the Creation Of Rural Nascent Start-ups (ACORNS) programme, she has met many women that have been returning to the farm and bringing their innovative ideas with them.

"As a woman in agriculture it has definitely been a very positive experience. I've seen a lot more women coming back to the farm to do different things and coming up with some exciting new ideas".

Anne Marie feels that she was lucky to have the support of her family members and roots in an established family farm when starting her business, but one of her biggest takeaways is the importance of

asking for help. Anne Marie has found that gaining knowledge from her peers is often of huge benefit when entering into the agricultural sector.

"There's a lot of people you can reach out to for help and to be honest I'm not afraid to ask. A lot of people have gone before you and will have a lot more experience and answers than you have so as long as you're not afraid to ask, a lot of people want to help".



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