

Making The Most Of A Small Land Area – Direct Marketing at Glasraí Organic Farm



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Land values restrict the opportunities available to new entrants and to existing business looking to expand, limiting the area they can afford to purchase. So how do you make the most of a small land area? Glasraí Organic Farm in Hollymount, Co Mayo, Ireland, is a business which has tackled such a challenge.

The Farm

Glasraí Organic Farm is a 7-acre certified organic farm, operated by Aoife Reilly and her husband Joe along with 5 employees. Since Aoife and Joe started the business in 2016, it has grown from a grass field to producing 40-50t of veg annually, along with eggs which the business direct markets to the consumer.



Glasraí has 5 acres in outdoor vegetable production, around 1 acre in multi-species green manures (legumes) and the remainder is either left to nature or under one of four commercial size polytunnels. The business's free range organic laying enterprise works alongside the vegetables, with the chickens complementing the green manures fertilising the soils.

However, the business has built up gradually with only one acre in production in year 1 and only one farmers market being serviced. Each year since starting operations the business has expanded both in terms of production, number of outlets for their product and in terms of staff.

The Product

Glasraí grows around 60 different crops within the year, including potatoes, carrots, parsnips, turnips, cabbages, kale, spinach, broccoli, cauliflower, leeks, beetroot, onions, garlic, salads, tomatoes, cucumbers, courgettes, peppers, French beans, strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries and rhubarb. This along with the free-range eggs, provides a wide range of products for the consumer.



Glasraí does buy in some products, particularly fruit. This increases the quantity of products available to the consumer and also increases revenue. However, Aoife and Joe are looking at increasing fruit production to meet more of this demand themselves.



Direct Marketing

Glasrai follow two main marketing methods, B2B and B2C (business to business, and business to consumer). They sell B2B (business to business) by selling directly into independent restaurants, and SME retailers. Glasrai also have success selling B2C (Business to consumer) through their 'green' box scheme and at farmers markets and local food markets. This diversified set of outlets for their produce has advantages, on one hand it enabled Glasraí to weather the challenging market conditions presented by Covid-19 and to market its diverse range of produce but on the other hand it increases the complexity of marketing operations, with each market/buyer requiring different produce, packaging and legislative considerations.



The main outlet for Glasraí's product is the Farmers market. This requires hired labour to operate it, which can be a challenge as no one likes to work weekends. However, it requires less packing, no labelling (which can be expensive).

The business's Box scheme really came into its own during the Covid 19 pandemic, with demand jumping from 30 to 40 boxes per week to 120 boxes a week. This necessitated the need for a website to take orders as well as deliveries being halted to enable the current labour units at Glasrai to handle the increased demand. The main challenge with the box scheme is getting the orders correct and communicating with customers.

The business's Wholesale demand from shops increases greatly in the summer and is mostly comprised of high value vegetables, again, this is a market that developed during the pandemic, with supply chain disruption presenting a unique opportunity for businesses like Glasraí to fill the gap. However, this is more paperwork heavy, with greater labelling requirements than the direct market.

In addition to the above, Glasraí also supplies a few local restaurants, focusing on leaves alongside other vegetables. However, they do not supply restaurants that only want vegetables, as the sale of leaves are what make supplying restaurants financially viable. In addition, purchasing additional goods also allowed Glasraí to keep employees on over winter. Enabling year-round employment, benefiting the employee and the employer as no new staff need to be found or sourced annually.

Aoife & Joe's Top Tips

Marketing

- **Your WHY is your most important marketing resource. Effective marketing must convey WHY someone should care about what you're doing, and WHY they want to buy it. This is knowing your USP.**
- **Always keep the customer at the front of your decisions, understand what they want, and make sure everything you do is led by them and their needs, and make sure you are solving a problem, filling a gap, or serving a need that exists.**
- **Remember that marketing is ultimately about building relationships, give people an emotional connection to what you do and why you do it and make them feel that they get a benefit over and above your product or service by choosing you.**
- **Invest in your marketing activity – whether time or money – it doesn't just happen you need to invest in it to make it work.**
- **Know your limits – what can you do, what are you great at or what can you learn. If there are marketing activities that you're not confident with or not interested in, consider asking for help or working with someone else to get it done.**

Although Glasraí does have a presence on social media, as well as having a website, social media isn't the main focus of Glasraí's marketing. Aoife prefers marketing the old-fashioned way, face to face. As such Glasraí top marketing tips is to simply be passionate and knowledgeable about your product.

To this end, anyone from the Glasraí team that are given the task of taking the product to market must be personable and have practical knowledge of the production product. This has resulted in Glasraí's stand being visited not only by customers but by other small-scale growers looking for practical advice on horticulture. This is something that Aoife says their customers really value.

Record keeping

Aoife has only recently started to keep accurate records of financial and physical performance; this has been a game changer for the business. Enabling Aoife and Joe to properly assess the performance of different crops, public demand and therefore inform future decisions including what to plant.

Implementing SOP's

As the business has grown Aoife and Joe have discovered the importance of implementing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), think of it like a recipe or a set of instructions, this ensures that all work is carried out to a consistent standard. This is particularly important in direct marketing when customers can expect a consistent product.

The People

With all businesses which seek to direct market their product staff management is key.

Aoife's top tips are as follows:

- **Pay is not the be all and end all when it comes to good staff management,**
- **Engage staff, bring them into the decision making so that they are self-motivated,**
- **Vary the work, switch jobs every couple of hours, this not only ensures staff don't get bored but also ensures that all staff can do all jobs – increasing the resilience of the business to illness etc.**
- **Provide other benefits other than pay – flexible working hours and free meals,**
- **Despite being a seasonal business try to retain staff full time, although this is more costly with regards to wages it saves money and time on recruitment and staff training.**
- **Maintain a fun, relaxed working environment.**



Another key component to Aoife and Joe's approach to staff management is to also look after themselves, ensuring that they take time off and refresh themselves so that they remain passionate and enjoyable to work with.

This is a key component of ensuring the long-term survival of any business, without a work life balance that works for you and your staff you will not enjoy the join and neither will the staff.