



## Success for stay at home butcher Bermingham

Newbridge in Kildare is famous for its silverware and it is here that The Market Butchers hope to make their own silver after opening the second retail butchers owned by Michael Bermingham and Karl Freeman, entrepreneurs who run a thriving wholesale meat business called M&K Meats.

Supported by a state-of-the-art factory in Rathcoole, Co Dublin, they use traditional butcher's methods to both age and process all types of meat, including beef, lamb, pork, bacon, poultry and game.

Clients include some of the finest restaurants, hotels and supermarkets in the country supplying the likes of L'Ecrivain and Chapter One restaurants. Their apricot-flavoured black pudding - it's a signature recipe - was developed in conjunction with master chef Derry Clarke. Michael Bermingham explained:-

"One of the things I enjoy most about this business is working with great chefs to come up with new cuts and new flavours. Trying new things and continuously being creative has proved key to our ongoing success."



The Market Butchers underline their specialist tag by supplying less common meats including home grown wallaby. Michael continues:- "We are the only suppliers of it in Ireland. We source our wallaby from Lambay Island off the Dublin Coast and we have exclusive rights to all the beef, lamb, venison and rabbit produced on the island."

He is full of praise for the farmers from whom he sources his meat, saying they are the best suppliers in the country. "We visit every farm, abattoir and supplier to inspect their facilities and their HACCP before working with them."





Among these key suppliers is Connemara Hill Lamb. Indigenous to the Connemara region, these lambs derive their unique taste and flavour from their natural grass diet, which is rich in herbs and heather. Their organic black pork and bacon is sourced from Pat O'Doherty's Fine Meats in Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh, their rare breed pork hails from Peter Whelan's The Whole Hoggs farm in Slane, Co Meath, while their chicken comes from Mary Reagan at Reagan's Organic Produce in Enniscorthy, Co Wexford.

Michael himself grew up in Tallaght, one of a family of 13 boys and girls, nine of whom had emigrated by the time he had finished school. At the age of 11, he began working part-time in the local butcher's shop. "Little did I realise at the time, that years later I would end up owning the shop," he proudly claims.

After school, he completed a four-year apprenticeship in butchering at the Dublin Institute of Technology in Mountjoy Square. In addition, he also spent time working in local abattoirs in order to better understand the entire meat-processing industry.

Keen to remain in Ireland, he took the brave step of opening his own butcher's shop in Drimnagh, in Dublin, and convinced Karl Freeman, also a qualified butcher, to join him in the venture. He was then only 20 years old.

"Karl essentially looked after the shop while I focused on building external relationships with restaurants and shops," explains Michael.

While the shop was doing well, the market for meat in Ireland began to undergo major change. The emergence of large supermarkets and shopping centres meant that many smaller local butcher shops were forced to close.

"However, we were fortunate that in tandem with this challenge, a major food revolution was beginning to take place. More and more restaurants and hotels began opening up, and pubs began to serve food for the first time. As a result, this created a substantial and important secondary market for us," explains Michael.



In 1993, Paddy Reilly, who owned the butcher's where Michael worked as a teenager, decided to retire from the business - and offered to sell it to Michael. The only problem was that he didn't have any money.

"My father was retiring that year and he stepped in and lent me the money to buy the place," Michael tells me. "And I even managed to pay him back after only the first two years in business. With interest," he adds with a smile.

The following year, Michael and Karl set up a small factory in Crumlin to service their now growing restaurant customer base. By 2002, the business was doing so well that it lacked sufficient space to meet orders. That, coupled with increasingly demanding food standard regulations, convinced the pair to build a new factory in Greenogue Business Park just outside Rathcoole.

"At the same time we also made the decision to let go of our two shops in order to concentrate on growing the wholesale side of the business," explains Michael.

Like most other food companies, the downturn in the economy had a knock-on effect on the business as fewer people were choosing to eat in restaurants and hotels. "As a result, eating-in was becoming the new going-out - and we realised the potential of focusing on this aspect of things," he explains.

It was then that Michael teamed up with Michelin- starred chef Derry Clarke, to create a new range of meat products which would be sold under the new brand name, GrazerField. This range was targeted specifically at the retail market and opened up a new channel through shops and supermarkets.

To capitalise further on the retail market, the pair opened two new retail shops of their own under the brand name of The Market Butchers - one on Prussia Street in Dublin, the other in Newbridge, Co Kildare. Today, they employ 18 staff in their factory and a further six between the two shops. And with more shops in the pipeline, this number is set to double in the near future.







"We are very lucky with our staff because they share our passion for quality and service. Some of them have been with us for over 15 years. Our motto here is that staff work with us, not for us," he says. So what plans does he have for the future?

"We're planning two more butcher's shops in 2014 and we have also just launched a range of gluten-free, coeliac and vegan products," Michael replies enthusiastically. "And we are currently enhancing the 'buy online' side of our business, both for our wholesale and our retail customers," he adds.

Michael Bermingham and Karl Freeman possess one characteristic that is common to most successful entrepreneurs: they love what they do. They started out small, and through hard work, drive and initiative they have grown that business.

They succeeded by knowing their business and their market. They have built strong relationships with stakeholders in every stage of the supply chain - farmers, wholesalers, chefs and consumers. When they were faced with a downturn in the market, they didn't give up. On the contrary, they responded by launching a new range, opening two new butcher's shops, and setting up a dedicated online service.

The story of M&K Meats proves that every person can make a difference. By deciding not to emigrate, but to stay at home and start his own business, Michael Bermingham has made - and continues to make - a real difference. His staff, his suppliers, his customers and the wider economy are certainly all the better for it.

