



**Case Study – Trends and Innovation**  
**Just Love Food Co**

# Mike Woods - Just Love Food Co



**Two of my three Children were diagnosed with severe nut allergies 25 years ago. First in the school at the time.**

**Was MD of two Large Cake businesses in Wales but chose to set up Just Love food co in 2010, the first cake manufacturer in Europe to declare on pack their cakes guaranteed nut free.**

**Started by Supplying two cakes to Sainsburys with 10 staff , now Supplying Tesco , Asda , Waitrose , Sainsburys , Ocado , Bidfood, Brakes , Harlech and Castell Howell , employing 75 staff**



**JLF as a mission based- allergen safe cake business with a purpose of making sure no one missed out on celebrating with cake and that the cake you have on your allergy free occasion is not just right for you but loved by everyone**

**Gone on a journey from being just nut free celebration cake to now having all 14 of the 14 allergies available without a may contain warning and on the go to coffee shops now catered for . Use two recipes . A gluten Free recipe and a vegan recipe**

## ABOUT JUST LOVE

# Our Factory and Our People



**Based in Blackwood, South Wales**

‘Keep Breaking new ground’

F&D Wales Innovation winner 2023

No one wants a dry cake, even if it is Free from

Won 3 Golds in 2025 FF Awards

Allergen First - It Must be Safe

All 14 allergens are available free from with no ‘May Contain’ warnings

People are critical

90% of staff live within 10 miles of site.

Female Representation at Management level higher than factory

No Agency Workers.

Support local and national charities

# Current Branded Retail Range: Now Includes individual cakes

Do make Own label and Licensing cakes as well



# Wholesale Food Service Range

## Pre-sliced Cakes



## Portioned Traybakes



## Individually Wrapped Single Portions



\*Sold Frozen\*

Currently in Bidfood, Brakes, Castell Howell & Harlech



# Trends and Innovation at the heart of what we do.

- In Forecast planning
- In product development
- In Employment
- In allergy Management



# Trends and Innovation at the heart of what we do.

- In Forecast planning –
  - Food allergy prevalence has more than doubled since 2008
  - In England it has increased from 0.4% to 1.1% of the population in that period
  - Among young people up to 8 % of children now have food allergies
- When I started 1 in 50 (2%) of children were considered to have a nut allergy and very little known about egg and milk – Celebration was a £100m category at the time so my simple maths said we should be a £2m business i.e. 2 % of it, if most birthday cakes were bought for children.
- Now if it is 8 % of children have food allergies our sales opportunity would increase by 4-fold and you could expect 8% of the £100m would buy . Ie £8m . Our Turnover is £6m this year and on track for £7.5m next year



# Trends and Innovation at the heart of what we do.

- In Forecast planning –
  - If you include Hay Fever , Asthma and Eczema as an allergy to something ( pollen etc ) in with Food Allergies then 44% of UK Adults have at least one allergy . UK is one of the highest allergic countries
  - 48 % of Households in the UK have at least one person avoiding some food item for some reason
  - Been a 160 % increase in Hospital Admissions for allergic reactions over last 20 years - we make up 2 of those visits after having reactions when eating out.
  - Eating out and travelling though with Allergies now taken far more seriously by the trade , wanting to find inclusive ways of including allergy customers safely . Hence our move into individual wrapped portions, provider does not need to handle the product them selves which is usually a relief



# Trends and Innovation at the heart of what we do.

- In product development
  - Removing Gluten - Using top branded Gluten free flour that combines a number of different natural flours ( rice etc ), Ratio of oil AND margarine on madeira and all oil on chocolate and used retired Expert master baker from previous employer to really focus on Mixing and processing methods.
  - Removing egg and milk by increasing protein , initially used Soya milk ( 8% protein ) and a regular gluten containing flour
  - Removed soya – replacing with Higher protein wheat flour (14%) – with a additional amount of wheat protein from an Isolate from the wheat flour
  - So replaced allergens by using other natural ingredients but protein and bakery expertise at the heart of it to get you the lift you need
  - And in packaging . On the back of each celebration cake is a cut out of what cake allergens are Free form which can be used on the table where it is being served



# Trends and Innovation at the heart of what we do.

- In Employment
  - 90 % of staff live within 10 miles – Sponsor local rugby team
- Family Business,
  - Son and Daughter who have the allergies now work in the business . Danika Heading up Sales and Rourke Heading up Supply Chain – Buying and Planning
  - Every Quarterly review staff see in the room the people who are vulnerable if they make a mistake
  - Wife Heads up HR
- Flexible Working to attract the very best
  - Head of Making the Products in NPD runs his own Personalised Cake business outside . Keeps very close to trends
  - Head of NPD works 4 days a week and finishes at 2.00 to manage child care when they come home from school
  - Head of HR works 2 days a week
  - Can't WFH to physically make the cake but have all salaried staff in on a Monday with team meeting and balance is more in than not in
- No Zero-hour contracts – No Agency labour.



# Trends and Innovation at the heart of what we do.

- In allergy Management

- Use trusted known suppliers at launch . Many not changed
- Use local where ever we can – Risks now heightened if buying from area impacted by war
- Use rapid tests on site based on risk assessment to constantly keep risk at the fore front of every staff members thinking. Including random overall / hand checks , and use a quiz on new starters with a buddy up system to elevate understanding
- Supplier risk assessments fabulously created by our team
- Two allergy manufacturing disciplines. Gluten Free Day that contains egg and a Vegan day that contains Wheat . Never make a product with an allergy claim on the same day as that allergy is handled . ALL food contact items are dedicated to that day . We have two blue conveyor belts for each conveyor . So the food contact item is always safe and the cake remains great



# Allergy trends.

- Most severe allergy remains Peanuts and tree nuts and it tends to stay for life
  - Seeing increased demand for schools to provide safe food
  - Increased demand for children's hospitals to provide safe food for patients
- Cows Milk growing and with more anaphylaxis reactions caused by cows milk rather than nuts last year for the first time. But many do grow out of it . Rise in alternatives to dairy milk you would think would help but some of those are having reactions as well so one to watch
- Eggs , common in babies and young children which do then go
- Then Cereals containing Gluten . Massive growth in Gluten free market not just from those with allergies but health choice for some too



# Next challenges

- I won't compromise on Quality but aim is to remove Egg from Gluten Free .
- Can we get a 14-allergy free celebration cake to last 30 days – naturally
- New allergies – Pea Protein is one of the fastest growing food allergies ??
- Limits of detection going down and down , Thresholds a factor to avoid limiting choice
- Cost of living affecting Everything – There is a cost to making products safe .



Any Questions ?

