

Case study:
Enterprise Renewal
Business Grant

Region
Wrexham

Sector
Food and drink

Project value
£3,183

MOUNTAIN PRODUCE

A trailblazing culinary oil producer squeezed maximum benefit from an investment in new filling and labelling equipment.

For 10 years Chris Boyle of Mountain Produce has been supplying pubs, restaurants and cafés with leafy salad crops from his small farm 1,200 feet up in the hills of Minera. Grown hydroponically in nutrient-rich water, his lettuce, watercress, peashoots and edible flowers are famous for their freshness and flavour.

Looking to expand his product range, he began producing cold-pressed culinary oils: a rich, nutty and smooth rapeseed oil and a light, delicate sunflower oil. They were a big hit not just with his hospitality customers but also retailers such as local farm shops and delis. No surprise because this was a trailblazing move. Mountain Produce are thought to be the only UK producer of cold-pressed sunflower oil and just the second Welsh producer of cold-pressed rapeseed oil.

"Refined oil is chemically stripped and goes through at much higher temperature," explains Chris. "Cold-pressed oil is just squeezed, like an extra-virgin olive oil. Nothing is added so you get much more flavour. One local chef told me he used to use olive oil for his sauces and aioli, and goose fat or beef dripping for his roast potatoes. Now he's just using our rapeseed oil for everything and says it's the best thing he's ever done. It produces a lovely crisp potato, is a lot better for you – and it's cheaper."

Demand was taking off but Chris was still filling and labelling his bottles by hand – a highly time-consuming and inefficient process. Having invested heavily to set up his cold-pressing plant, there was no spare capital to smooth the operation. An Enterprise Renewal grant enabled him to buy a semi-automatic labelling machine, a vacuum filler, food-safe bench scale and other equipment – so he could fill his bottles more easily and supply an innovative 10-litre "bag in box" for refill shops. This was supported by a social media campaign, point-of-sale materials and a new tablet to keep online marketing up to date.

"We've seen a big impact for a relatively small amount of money," says Chris. "The grant allowed me to access a new market in the most efficient way possible and make our business more resilient and sustainable."

"As a direct result of the new equipment I've been able to supply 21 new retailers and one distributor and turnover has increased significantly. We're out there promoting our cold-pressed oils at food fairs and markets and are thinking about expanding the range to include flavoured oils and vinaigrettes."

