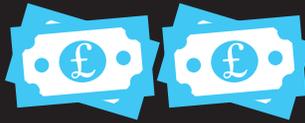


Stuart's Foods in figures

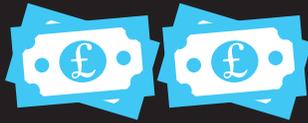
£10m

2022 turnover target



£3.5m

Annual turnover



1986 YEAR FOUNDED



1,000 customers

Staff across three sites



60 seconds with Damian Howarth

What is the best piece of business advice you can offer?

Write your ideas down and plan how to achieve the goals.

What is your philosophy with regards to work?

Enjoy it. Sometimes it can get stressful, but at other times, it is enjoyable, so make sure you look for the positives.

Who has had the biggest influence on your career?

My father. I have learnt from the mistakes and successes he had in his time at the business.

What do you get up to in your spare time?

We have a young child, so lots of family stuff at the moment. I also enjoy football – not so much playing any more, but watching Scarborough Athletic and Manchester United – and snow sports, too.



Between the two businesses, Stuart's covers most of Lincolnshire, North Yorkshire, East Yorkshire and Humberside – about 8,000 square miles in total.

What's more, the business is opening a distribution hub near the A1 in Ripon, North Yorkshire this month. Damian Howarth says: "We will transport across from Seamer to Ripon and then we can offer a better service for the people over there, as the vehicles can go out two to three times a day. This move means we can go up to Newcastle and down to Sheffield in 75 minutes, which opens up new opportunities."

It is all go at the moment for the business, as plans are in the offing to diversify the product range. "We do not do loads on the ambient side, but that is what we want to get into more," Howarth says.

"We do drops to several customers in a number of regions with our usual products, so it is probably easier to sell other products to them and less costly, too. Fresh produce can be difficult for picking and processing orders, as you are splitting everything down and you have to weigh items.

"Dry goods do not involve this and when you split things down, it is probably higher value. If, through ambient goods, we can increase the average order value, we can up our profit. We can then feed that back to suppliers, customers and employees, and use it to try to improve where we stand in the local community."

At present, ambient goods count for around 4% of what the business does. Howarth is determined not to move away from being a specialist fruit and veg company, but admits dry goods could overtake fruit and veg as the biggest contributor to turnover.

Howarth's ambition is to have a turnover of around £10m in four years' time, up from £3.5m. However, he will not try to force the business into growth it cannot handle: "We need to keep an eye on our growth," he notes. "We have seen it before where companies grow a bit too fast and get caught out financially."

With 40 staff and 19 vehicles across the three sites, the business has a strong network in place to keep growing. Howarth is keen to build up to having a transport manager, along with a team of business development managers, but he is aware that this is only achievable once the business scales up. The same goes for joining a buying group, too.

8,000 Square miles covered by Stuart's after acquiring S Clift Foods

Having retained S Clift's identity, cultivating a family-owned ethos is a fundamental part of the business' strategy.

"We are local companies and are respondent to turn things around quickly," Howarth says. "But we are still big enough to get good deals and keep costs lower."

He adds: "We have a vision and mission statement and we have 14 culture points, too, which makes us 'us'. We want our team to be a part of the business and help the customers and suppliers, and work for each other rather than competing departments. Yes, we have to make some money, but we need our customers and suppliers to do the same, so we can all feed and support the regional economy."

Howarth is immensely proud of what the business has achieved and is keen to carry on his parents' legacy.

"In their first week, mum and dad took £15 in takings," he recalls. "Now we want to be a £10m business. Who could have seen that coming?" ●