

UK: Duck eggs becoming more popular

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A recent survey in the UK reveals that only 1 of 13 supermarkets listed duck eggs, of which only 2 actually stocked them and even these only had them at selected stores.

Watercress Lane supplies more than 7 mln duck eggs each year to the wholesale, retail and catering sectors and is the UK's leading producer of duck eggs. The company is primarily a hatchery that supplies day-old ducklings to independent duck egg and meat producers.

However, following the liquidation of its major client that had been taking 25,000 day-old ducklings a week, there was an urgent need to look for other options, reports Farm Business.

Owner Paul Leveridge and his partner Melandy Daniels say that it was devastating for business. "We had 25,000 eggs being laid every week with nowhere for them to go," Daniels says. "We saw that tapping into the market for eggs could be as important as finding new customers for the day-olds."

Watercress Lane Duck Egg

In January 2008 the couple launched their own retail duck egg business – the Watercress Lane Duck Egg brand, and customers now include wholesalers, Noble Foods and other retailers and the catering sector. Now a number of supermarkets are making enquiries in reaction to public demand.

Increase demand for duck eggs and meat

Demand for Watercress Lane's duck eggs has increased 45% in the past year; the 8,000 birds producing eggs can't keep up and Leveridge and Daniels are looking to expand through establishing franchises in other parts of the UK.

As for the day-old side of the business, numbers are once again on the up and have reached about 4,500 day-olds a week, reflecting the increase in demand for duck eggs and meat, Farm Business continues. Leveridge and Daniels received their export license in the latter part of 2009, are already exporting day-olds to the Ireland Republic.

For now the eggs represents 70% of turnover and the hatchery 30%, but the latter is the more profitable enterprise.

The couple is now behind a high-profile publicity push to establish duck eggs as a more commonplace food. High street retailers are being targeted through the launch of a major marketing campaign to take advantage of consumers' appetite for new and innovative products by promoting the affordability, superior flavour and health properties of duck eggs.

"Blue Duck" standard

While the hatchery is Freedom Food accredited, there is no legislation to comply with when it comes to the layer side of the farm because it does not exist for duck eggs and there is no equivalent of the British Lion quality mark. So Watercress Lane has developed its own “Blue Duck” standard.

“We guarantee the quality, freshness and safety of our eggs and the welfare of the ducks, which are managed in accordance with the RSPCA’s Freedom Foods code of conduct for hatcheries,” Daniels says. “We vaccinate for salmonella and manually stamp best before dates on boxes and eggs, a process that is time consuming and that will be automated in the future.”

“We hope that the campaign and other activities of a PR agency we have recently employed will increase the public appetite for duck eggs further.”

Source: Farm Business