

Do yourself a flavour – try Jill’s fruits of labour!

Jill Brown, an agribusiness student from a Caithness farming background, is combining Scottish fruit with alcohol to make a flavoured vodka with a difference which is tickling the tastebuds of increasing numbers of discerning drinkers.

Really Raspberry and Straight Strawberry are the first two flavours from Caithness-based business, Berry Good, which was officially launched in June 2008.

The set of rules applied for recipes is that the main ingredients have to be made or grown in Scotland and no artificial colours or flavours are added. Because of this each batch may have a different colour or flavour, however, to date it has been quite consistent especially so the taste. The first comment that customers tend to have is related to the flavour, in that it really does taste like raspberries or strawberries.

The idea was started in 2007 whilst attending the Royal Highland Show. Jill had made a few bottles of flavoured vodka in the past to take to the show and noted that there were a few companies who had started this up as a business but thought her product tasted better and so Berry Good was born.

Jill said: “When I compared the products I felt that my own recipe had the edge.”

By Christmas 2007 Jill had produced a batch and retailed it to a few local shops. To ensure the product stood out Jill approached designers to come up with branding and label design whilst also approaching Highlands and Islands Enterprise to see if there were courses, grants, loans and so on that could be available to purchase equipment to then allow for production to take place on a larger scale.

Jill (29) commented: “It has been an incredible learning curve that’s not finished yet! I’ve been lucky to have support from my family and Highlands and Islands Enterprise which really gave Berry Good the boost it needed to start off.”

The launch was held at the Taste of Grampian in June 2008, just under a year since the original idea was thought of.



Picture: Gary Anthony

Jill Brown’s flavoured vodka business is enjoying a real taste of success

Next was Turriff Show in August which was a sell-out.

“We just couldn’t believe the response from customers, some had seen us at the Taste of Grampian and were back to buy more and they were also telling us what cocktails they’d tried or if they’d made one up. Alex Salmond popped in past for a quick dram whilst on his rounds at the show!”

October saw Berry Good attend the Taste of Caithness and Sutherland. Jill said: “It was really good to meet other local businesses and customers from the home area. The morning event was set up for trade customers with chef Jacqueline O’Donnel using Really Raspberry to marinate venison with winter berries which was fantastic.

It was then onto the BBC Good Food Show in Glasgow. The stand was located opposite Gordon’s Gin with none other than Gordon Ramsay and his wife Tana making regular appearances to promote their recent books.

Jill said: “Tana was really nice, she sampled some of the vodka and gave it the thumbs up!”

In addition to the two established flavours of Really Raspberry and Straight Strawberry the BBC Good Food Show was the first release of a Limited Edition flavour of Strawberry and Black Pepper, again this sold out by Sunday.

Shortly after the Glasgow event, Gordon & MacPhail placed orders for its own shop as well as wholesale supplier for additional customers. Jill stated: “Having Gordon & MacPhail stock the product really was essential for the business having such a northern location, it is really supportive of the products. Another stockist is Northlink Ferries which stocks the drinks in its shops.”

Not to be kept idle Jill is also a full-time student at SAC Aberdeen studying Agriculture and Rural Business Management as part of an Honours degree course.

Jill noted: “I’m really enjoying the course. Every year it gets better and I can link what I’m studying into the business.

“I have had amazing support from my family, especially mum who has been through every stage of the business from making recipes to labelling, not to mention manning the stand when I’m exhibiting.

“For the product launch I had a number of delivery problems with bottles and corks which meant to get everything filtered, bottled, labelled and boxed on time for the Taste of Grampian involved four generations of the family!

“In 2009 I’m looking to attend more events throughout Scotland, get online sales set-up and developing more flavours for our customers.”

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