

Laila's Fine Foods takes balanced approach

Blackpool-based ready meals business Laila's Fine Foods has increased its turnover six-fold to £18m in the last five years and is investing £1.3m over the next two years to ensure its continued growth.

The family business, which employs 250 staff, started in the home kitchen of Laila Remtulla in 1986. Today it supplies ready meals to supermarkets as own label products, which accounts for 70% of sales; as well as to Oakhouse Foods, which has 19 franchises supplying food to the elderly; and the foodservice market (Mecca Bingo, Spirit Pub Co).

Supermarket customers include Morrisons, Asda, Spar and Lidl and the company has just won a new contract to supply Iceland, worth around £3m a year.

Eldest daughter Zera, who joined the business in 2003 and is Sales and Technical Director, says: "We work with the supermarkets as openly as possible – you have got to be open and honest. If we can't give them what they want we just have to say 'no' and have a certain amount of strength. As long as we are honest when we are doing that, we do find they are reasonable to deal with."

"In terms of expansion, we want to try to get out to more people so we are taking on extra sales staff in the next year."

Zera Remtulla, Director, Laila's Fine Foods

The company is predicting yet more impressive growth next year, with turnover hitting between £22 – 25m, following the Iceland contract and with a focus on further developing the wholesale side of the business.

"There is partly a rebalancing aspect to that but also wholesale is good business to have and it is where we started. It was our bread and butter," says Zera.

Expansion plans

"In terms of expansion there is still a lot to go at in this country – we want to try to get out to more people. We have a very small sales team at present so we are taking on extra sales staff in the next year."



The Directors at Laila's Fine Foods win Family Business of the Year at the Red Rose Business Awards 2014

The company is also investing £290,000 in new machinery and has received a £58,000 grant from Regenerate Pennine Lancashire's Accelerated Business Growth Fund, which accounts for 20% of the total investment.

Zera adds: "The next stage will see around £1m, with a loan facility from Barclays, invested over the next two years in machinery and also extending our premises and production facility at the current site.

"You have to keep evolving. Every customer likes to see growth in the work you do with them. So it's to gain new customers, but also to grow with the customers you have and stay on top of our game with them."

