

# BUSINESS DAILY

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## MAGAZINES

# Couple spurs cheese firm to grow business ideas



Above: Brown's Cheese owners Delia and Andrew Stirling at their farm in Tigonini in Limuru. Left: Some of the company's dairy products. DIANA N

Three years ago, a cheese-making family was worried about succession. Mr David Brown and his wife Sue, who their child they planned would take over the establishment had shown little interest.

However, today Mr Brown, 65, and the wife are enjoying retirement in Isiolo after their daughter, Delia Stirling, international business graduate, took over the management of the company.

For Mrs Stirling, her new responsibility as a mother of two is what made her rethink about taking over their 32-year paying job in America.

Brown's Cheese, which made it to the list of the Business Daily's Top 100 SMEs last year, is creating waves in the South African Dairy Championship. Locally, they were recognised at number 30 among the Top 100 medium si

The Stirlings have gone to great lengths to market the business and bring in new ideas.

Brown's Cheese is no longer a small family business started by her parents. "The ban on imported cheese in Kenya product. There was none being made locally by then," says Mrs Stirling.

"My dad kept requesting mum to make cheese. At first, she thought it was impossible but tried it out with left over and wanted to buy the product. That is how Brown's cheese was started."

Brown's Cheese is gaining ground in the local market, thanks to the growing middle class that is fast adopting the

"We now have more Kenyans eating cheese than before. This is simply because most of them have been abroad she says. "They have also developed liking for wines and chocolates too."

Although the entrepreneurs are trying their best to get more Kenyans try out cheese and make it part of their diet

To overcome this hurdle, they have invested in marketing and creating brand awareness for their products.

This campaign, they say, is driven by public relations rather than marketing strategies.

The company organises annual training for top chefs in Nairobi on use of cheese in preparation of western delicacies

The sessions have become popular with hotels, which are also their clients. Some of the 40 chefs enrolled for this year are from the Sarova Group. The Brown's Cheese also conducts the training in major supermarkets.

This year, the company got an export window to Rwanda for their products.

They say this was a major breakthrough since they plan to tap the East African Community market.

The company also organises cheese tasting events throughout the year.

"We have wine and cheese lunches here at the farm every day. We did the beer and cheese at Brew Bistro on Ngara Road and have wine and cheese dinner at the Zen Garden," says Mrs Stirling.

The Stirlings have also invested heavily in technology. They have launched a website for the business, which they also have an option to buy online.

"The first impression of a website is to be able to tell your story quickly and effectively. This is why we have invested in

The renewed vigour at Brown's Cheese has seen a 40 per cent increase in production and sales in less than two years. The firm is currently strengthening its partnership with farmers through three co-operative societies, which represent

They also educate dairy farmers on quality milk production and increased their product range to 15.

"We are the only cheese makers in the world with such a variety. Most of them, due to huge market demand, produce locally," says Mrs Stirling.

Default on payments for their products by some clients have slowed the company's growth.

Mr Stirling says it is a challenge to deal with customers who fail to pay up.

He says this is in contrast to North America, where a letter from a lawyer easily compels one to settle a debt.

Securing spare parts for their equipment is another hurdle they have had to contend with.

“Our machinery is imported. And whenever a part of the machine breaks down we are forced to wait for months. Kenyans are very creative. We can walk to Industrial Area and get a copy of the part and use it as we wait for the

Brown’s Cheese owners say that they are working hard to be among the best 10 in next top 100 medium sized cc to boost workers’ morale since it acknowledges their effort.

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