

COLLABORATION SOWS OAT SUCCESS



Improving Scotland's
food and drink businesses
through collaboration

SCOTLAND
OF FOOD & DRINK

The Oat Group was one of three set up in 2003 as part of the Health Enhancing Foods project, funded by Scottish Enterprise (SE). Along with the Omega 3 and Berry groups, the Oat Group was established to bring producers, processors and research institutes together to look at how the products could be promoted more effectively. The overall aim is to grow each of the sectors and add value to the raw materials.

The Oat Group consists of HGCA (formerly Home-Grown Cereals Authority), Grampian Oat Products, John Hogarth, Walkers, Nairns, Oatmeal of Alford, Spoff, Ops and Technical Solutions (Oats), Michael Wilson (Farmer), Paterson Arran, Tilquhillie Puddings, and the Scottish Crop Research Institute (SCRI). SAOS facilitates the group, with the support of HGCA.

The group's objective was to raise awareness to help maintain and drive new and increased demand for oat products, although no specific growth targets were set. However, as one of the main indicators of the PR campaign's success was the level of press and media coverage for the product, a target number of articles was agreed as a measure.



ACTIVITY

To achieve the main objective, the members of the group knew that they would have to significantly increase consumer awareness of oats and oat based products. The project would also have to increase consumer understanding of the many benefits associated with the product. It was anticipated that increased knowledge would then lead to increased consumption and increased sales.

Hamish Walls, the SAOS project manager working with the group, describing how they set about the task, says: "The first thing we did was benchmark the existing scientific research on the health benefits of oats. After that, we did some consumer research to help us identify whom we should be targeting with the campaign."

That research showed that mothers and women in the 25+ age group were the

prime target, as they were the main shopping decision makers in most households.

The research also revealed that many viewed oats and oat products as natural and nutritious, as well as versatile and filling. Away from breakfast, oats were not seen as a major component of a meal, but they were viewed as an excellent substitute for less healthy snack foods.

Comments Hamish: "This research identified an opportunity to create a campaign which reinforced those positive impressions of the product. The main messages of the promotion were focused around the health benefits, the versatility and the filling and energising nature of oats."

Having established the target markets and the key messages, the group commissioned a targeted media





campaign, focussed on the health of the whole family. It encompassed new oat-based recipes; press packs which offered a range of media messages on the nutritional benefits and versatility of oats; and background on the heritage of oats and their Scottish provenance.

Each media campaign costs around £40,000 and each member of the group makes a contribution to the costs. The rest is contributed by SE and HGCA.

BENEFITS

To date, the campaign has generated 121 pieces of 'on message' media coverage.

Says Hamish: "The oat sector in Scotland is relatively small, and no single company or grower could have afforded, or generated, this type of marketing campaign based on such sound scientific research."

"The collaborative approach from all sectors of the industry strengthens the communication message and coming from a third party helps to add credibility. In addition, HGCA has great networks with the media and with health professionals. This has provided access to channels of communication and marketing expertise not available to the individual members of the group. It also means participants are able to access funds

from SE and HGCA which they wouldn't be able to do as independent operators."

Says Alan Meikle of Grampian Oat Products: "It is fantastic that we have been able to get this group to work together. Through British Oat and Barley Millers Association (BOBMA), the oat industry has worked closely on a range of plant breeding and product safety issues important for the sector. However, we have never managed to achieve a market focused collaborative effort and the oat group has done an outstanding job of filling that gap. As a result, there are lots of positive messages out there to back up the individual marketing efforts of Grampian Oat Products and the whole package has really helped our business grow."



GETTING STARTED

Scottish Enterprise was the catalyst for the setting up of the group, but the membership was responsible for developing its strategy and carrying out its activities.

Hamish Walls adds: "There was no difficulty in persuading people to get involved, as the sector is small and there was understandable curiosity about what was being proposed. From initial discussions, it was clear that there was a great deal of agreement about the way forward and the group very quickly gelled."

Alan says: "I wasn't sure what to expect when the group got started, but very early on everyone realised that we could all benefit from helping the consumer to understand more about oats. It hasn't just been about the PR, although that has been massively helpful - the research that we have undertaken through the group has also helped Grampian Oat Products identify new opportunities, as well as shape the messages that we now use to promote our own product."

PROGRESS

The group meets about once a quarter to look at progress and make further plans. Says Hamish: "The project helps everyone, so there have been no conflicts of interest and no trust issues. Everyone has a vested interest in improving consumers' understanding of the benefits of the product and increasing consumption and sales."

Although there were no formal targets set for growing the sector, there has been generic growth in both volume and value during 2008/9. Volume growth is

estimated at around 5% and value growth at 14%. This encompasses sales of raw oats, flapjacks, oat based breakfast cereals, oatcakes and cereal bars.

The Oat Group has made steady progress towards its objectives and is keen to continue developing ideas which will promote the product further.

For more details about the All About Oats campaign, please visit www.allaboutoats.com

For further information about the Cultivating Collaboration project

please contact **Fiona Hamill** on 07799 450792 or **Rona Sutherland** on 01360 850763 or visit our website at www.ctwo.org.uk

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