



Glenisk flexes organic muscles with yoghurts

THE ECOLOGIST magazine landed in the letterbox this month, as it usually does. I took apart the brown, recycled A4 envelope it was wrapped in, and began flicking through the mag. At the back, there is a "green" consumer section with an editorial.

This month there was a special reader's offer in the consumer section for Stony yoghurt — billed as "yoghurt on a mission".

Like most offers in The Ecologist, this one read like an eco credentials list, from the wind-powered production plant to the certified organic nature of the yoghurt itself. This product is in fact made with Irish organic milk, supplied by Glenisk Dairies. Fairly quietly, this Irish organic product has snuck into the British market.

Glenisk have recently doubled their plant volume, with the workforce rising by 30 to 55.

This new product line includes a set of organic yogurts and fromage frais products, available throughout Britain. It is owned by Stonyfield UK, part of Stonyfield Europe, which obtained a 37% equity share in Glenisk last year.

"There was a lot of speculation in the media about it at the time, but the reality is that

no money per se changed hands," Vincent Cleary, managing director of the company, told me recently.

"The agreement was that we'd get a new factory, a capital injection into the company, and product development expertise."

As the weeks whiz by, it can be difficult to keep up with the unfolding Glenisk organic story.



Organic Diary

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The plant development involved an €8.5 million investment, "definitely the biggest investment we've ever undertaken," according to Vincent.

Along with the organic dimension, there are other ecological dimensions to the operation. Airtricity supply the power; their fleet of trucks is being converted to biodiesel, and they have a reed bed system for waste disposal.

You may have seen their new packaging and product range for the Irish market. They now have more than 20 products, including a new dessert range, a fromage frais and a crème fraîche.

They are also looking for 100 more organic dairy farmers to come on board. Currently, they use more than 5,000 tonnes of milk annually, but expect their yoghurt production to increase to 5,300 tonnes for 2007.

Incidentally, the price of a litre of Glenisk organic milk has increased, even allowing for the transfer over from 750ml to one litre cartons.

But how is the organic dairy farmer faring? Are they getting better prices than they were previously, or better prices than their conventional counterparts? According to Vincent, "it's in our interest to keep a level of daylight between the prices for conventional and organic milk."

Conventional prices, strong at the moment, can sometimes be difficult to calculate. Vincent said: "I met two conventional dairy farmers, one was getting 37c for fresh milk, the other was at 43c for powdered milk. The fella with the fresh milk was on higher money six months ago."

Glenisk make six-month

contracts with farmers, and when the prices were last being discussed, according to Vincent, there was indeed daylight between prices paid for conventional and organic.

Glenisk prices are set to peak at 55c per litre in February, to encourage winter milk production. "We want to ensure that there are no seasonal variations in our products. The days are long gone when people could come up to me and say that they could taste the difference between the winter and the summer yoghurts."

At the consumer end, they have a comprehensive website which is as much a lifestyle appendage as a place to get product info.

It even features an initiative called iMoo — Irish Mothers of Organic. This resource includes high profile experts giving advice on a whole range of parenting topics, from nutrition to being an eco-dad.

It's www.glenisk.com; why not have a look yourself?

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Thursday, 1 November 2007

Page: 018

Circulation: 56,441

Area of Clip: 37578.00mm

Clip ID: 26032



Vivienne Connolly and her daughter Katie at the launch of iMOO, Irish Mothers of Organic, an interactive community for parenting the organic way, hosted by www.glenisk.com.