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Gerard Cleary is financial director of Glenisk, a position he has held for over 15 years. Glenisk is a family-owned and operated organic dairy company, based in Killeigh, Co Offaly. Established in 1987, it switched over to organic production in 1995.

The company employs 55 people and has annual revenues of over €8.5 million. It buys 90 per cent of the organic milk produced on the island of Ireland. The company recently announced plans to convert a further 100 farmers to organic farming to meet its demands for increased production.

It also recently opened an €8.5 million eco-friendly manufacturing plant in Killeigh. Stonyfield Farm US acquired a 37 per cent minority stake in Glenisk in June 2006, which has allowed the company to sell to the British mar-

ket for the first time under the brand 'Stony, Yogurt on a Mission.'

What are the main responsibilities of your job?

As finance director, I am responsible for money, overseeing the budget and making sure that the books balance. As a co-owner of the business and a member of the board, I am also involved in safeguarding the company's vision and values and developing strategies that will

see us grow and encourage more consumers to choose organic.

What are your main professional motivators?

Growth and sustainability. I want Glenisk to become bigger and better. The timing is good and consumer interest in healthy foods has never been stronger. But we also have to be sustainable and that means organic agriculture, supporting family farms and using renewable energy.

We are also big on quality



Gerard Cleary

here. Our aim is to select the best local, organic ingredients and to use traditional yogurt-making methods with state of the art technology. Our philosophy is best summed up as: "healthy soil creates healthy food to help raise healthy children".

What four words would you

use to describe your work style?

Thorough – I am in finance! – dedicated, energetic and learning (all the time).

What was the best business

decision you ever made?

Making the decision as a family and company to partner with the world's largest organic yogurt producer, Stonyfield Farm US, which now has a minority stake in our business. Stonyfield shares our vision, but they were also once where we are now in the growth cycle, so we are reaping the benefits of their insights and experience.

What was the most valuable lesson you ever learned in business?

Listen to other points of view and be prepared to take good advice. At the same time, you have to make your own voice heard and fight for what you believe in. There is no point in regretting what you didn't say or do when it is too late.

Who do you most admire in Irish industry?

I admire entrepreneurs with vision. The late Tony Ryan stood out for the scale of his ambition and the courage to challenge accepted practice

in a difficult industry. Closer to home, I admire my late father, Jack Cleary, who started our business. He was willing to take risks and he was committed to producing good food. I like to think that we have maintained something of that bravery – when we first converted to organic production in 1995, a lot of people thought we were mad.

Is this where you expected to be five years ago?

Pretty close. The partnership with Stonyfield means that we are now producing organic yogurt for the British market and that has been a long held objective. We are also very glad to be developing the Glenisk brand at home.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Still making organic yogurt and hopefully extending the product range and exploring new markets. Crucially, I hope to witnessing a much greater percentage of Irish agricultural land converting to organic.