



Meadow Mushrooms... healthy for the individual, the community and the planet

At a time when many businesses are hunkering down, Meadow Mushrooms is continuing its tradition of sustainable growth and development.

The company has recently embarked on major redevelopment of its Canterbury production facilities that will see an investment of more than \$40 million over the next two years, and 100 jobs created. Meadow Mushrooms currently employs 550 people.

It is the company's commitment to growth that is key to their 40-year success, says chief executive Roger Young. "Meadow Mushrooms is a great example of a couple of entrepreneurs who started out with very little and poured everything into the business," says Roger. "They were passionate and dedicated, and believed in constant reinvestment. They were committed to sustainable growth."

Philip Burdon and the late Roger Giles formed Meadow Mushrooms in 1970, with the Burdon and Giles families remaining as owners of the company - Philip Burdon is now the chairman, with his daughter Miranda Burdon, and Roger Giles' daughter Emma Steel, directors of the company.

With increasing sales figures, Roger says the company continues to grow with the market. "We have been steadily growing for the last 40 years through continuous reinvestment, and plan to continue that growth," says Roger. "We watch the international trends very closely, and have certainly noticed changing purchasing patterns due to the downturn, but are fortunate to have not been affected. And, at the end of the day, there is really only one certainty - that it will get better.

"And if we wait until then, it will be too late. We need to invest now to prepare for the next 50 years."

It's that kind of philosophy that has grown Meadow Mushrooms from start-up to become the largest mushroom producer in the country - no easy feat considering there were more than 80 commercial mushroom farms in New Zealand in the 1960s.

With three separate growing sites producing 145 tonnes of mushrooms per week - destined solely for the domestic market - a lot has changed since those early days.

Fully integrated mushroom production facilities means mushrooms are no longer seasonal and so are readily available, and affordable, year-round. They are also available fresh, loose, packaged, processed or frozen for convenience, thus extending their use, shelf-date and target market.

In addition, the company has broadened the range from the market favourite - the white button mushroom - to include Swiss Browns (brown buttons) and Portobellos (large, flat 'BBQ' or 'breakfast' mushrooms). "We listen to market demand and follow international market trends very closely," says Roger. "We benchmark ourselves internationally, which is why our focus is very much on meeting or exceeding what they are doing overseas."

Meadow Mushrooms has also made significant investments into major marketing campaigns to support their customers in the retail, wholesale and food service sectors, championing the versatility, taste, nutritional benefits and sustainable production of mushrooms.

"Nowadays, there is an increased consciousness about the health benefits of mushrooms," says Roger. "They are a good source of B vitamins, potassium, selenium, copper, phosphorous and the antioxidant ergothioneine, while still being low in calories, fat and sodium. There is also research to suggest that regular consumption of mushrooms enhances the immune system and may help prevent breast cancer and prostate cancer.

"Modern mushroom cultivation also represents one of the most sustainable use of natural resources," says Roger. "Not only are we producing healthy food, without damaging the land, we are also one of the country's largest recyclers. The only by-product is mushroom compost, which is recycled into the horticulture and agriculture sectors as a potting mix and soil enhancer."

The company recently attained Gold Status in the Enviro-Mark NZ Certification Programme. It was also awarded the ACC Workplace Safety Award in the 2008 Champion Canterbury Awards.

"There is more to business than just commercial success - we also need to contribute to the health of our land, and the success of our community to make sure that we have a balanced perspective of the company.

"Yes, there is a cost to both," says Roger. "I wouldn't say that environmental sustainability and social responsibility directly enhance profits, but they certainly contribute to long-term business sustainability, which is - after all - what Meadow Mushrooms is all about."