

Building a house of cheese

South Australian family cheese manufacturing business La Casa Del Formaggio has broadened its business wings and is reaping the results.

Quite understandably, Claude Cicchiello lacked worldly experience when he first began working for the family's cheese manufacturing business as a teenager.

"When I was younger, I was quite naive so asked for very little advice. I pretty much did my own thing and fortunately it worked. As the business grew, I realised I didn't know it all and I decided to seek advice." Claude, who is now the Managing Director of La Casa Del Formaggio said.

Claude sought advice in a number of ways, taking a broad-brush approach to widening La Casa's horizons: the business joined a range of industry groups, sought expert external advice and used private and government services such as the SA Food Centre and Flavour SA to create strategic and marketing plans, assist with product development and to network.

"Some of the initiatives that we have been exposed to over the years have helped us as a business gain the confidence to move forward at a faster rate than otherwise may have been the case. For example we were able to engage the services of a cost accountant who helped cost the whole business as well as bring some disciplines. In the first year of the accountant, being on board company profits doubled with revenue only growing marginally," Claude said.

Claude said involvement with the SA Food Centre has provided valuable support to the business, assisting it with a number of projects including new product development, business development programs, assistance with applying for grants and attracting new, highly skilled people into the business.

Last year, La Casa became involved in the GAP (Graduate Access Program) with outstanding success. A young marketing graduate worked with the business during 2008 on projects ranging from sales and distribution to new product development, research into consumer trends, data collation to strengthen brand positioning and upgrading of the website. The graduate has now joined the La Casa team as a valued employee.

The SA Food Centre has also helped La Casa create and maintain valuable networks within the local and national food industry, providing them with support for strategic planning, assisting with a review of distribution channels to reduce freight costs, and providing the expertise of food technologists to refine food safety measures. The SA Food Centre's support on new product development issues had proven particularly valuable, resulting in reduced time and cost savings for the business.

Claude said the business and networking opportunities established through La Casa Del Formaggio's associations have helped him meet like-minded individuals in the food industry.

"I quickly learned that many of my issues were their issues. It also was rewarding to be able to give advice to other businesses," he said.

Claude said advice from SA Food Centre industry experts will help with the challenges of moving forward, and specifically help the business meet its target of doubling its size by the year 2012.

Gerardo and Rosa Cicchiello established the La Casa Del Formaggio business in 1988. The business has grown significantly over the last 10 years with staff numbers growing to more than 50.

Operating from a purpose-built export capable factory at Glyde, La Casa Del Formaggio produces a range of fresh Italian style cheeses - many made using traditional techniques. The range can be found in SA cafes, restaurants, hotels, continental and gourmet outlets as well as major supermarkets nationally.

Want to know more?

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