



Niall McAllister, Co-founder, QuickCrop

Start: Quickcrop

Making It Happen: Taking a cross-border approach to dealing with Brexit thanks to LEO Sligo

Growing successfully has always been vital for Quickcrop. The business has blossomed since it was set up in 2008 to provide complete kits for people who wanted to grow their own fruit and vegetables.

Quickcrop now offers a much wider range of gardening products, including raised beds, soils, seeds, garden tools and much more. It also provides advice and information on how to grow your own food.

Founders Niall McAllister and Andrew Davidson have grown the company from a humble seedling into a thriving online retailer which employs 11 people at its base in Ballymote, Co Sligo, and in 2017 generated sales of almost €1.3million.

“Quickcrop supplies everything people need for growing their own food – from a few salads and herbs in a window box to a much larger garden where someone is producing a good proportion of the food they eat,” Niall explains. “We’re also about the advice and expertise – our niche is providing people with everything they need to grow their own and also teaching them how to do it.”

Niall, like co-founder Andrew, had moved to Sligo from the east coast with his family “to live the good life” and ended up turning a passion into a thriving business. Along the way, they’ve received a range of financial supports and advice from the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) in Sligo, including a Business Priming Grant, a Business Expansion Grant, a Trading Online Voucher, mentoring, and a TAME grant to help them explore new markets.

However, for a company which has suppliers and customers in both the UK and Ireland, Brexit poses a significant challenge.

“We’re very exposed to Brexit. The fall in the price of Sterling in the last two years has cost the business substantial amounts of money. It’s brought our gross margin down by eight points because we have around 60% of our business in the UK.”

After completing the Enterprise Ireland Prepare for Brexit scorecard and seeking advice from their Local Enterprise Office, Quickcrop found a logistics partner across the border in Northern Ireland to pick and pack their orders for the UK market so that they were less exposed to fluctuating Sterling currency rates. But the implications of a hard Brexit means that Quickcrop has had to go even further to separate their Irish and UK operations.

Niall says: “The LEO put us in touch with InterTrade Ireland for advice about potential effects on our cross-border trade.

“For example, we sell about 200 different varieties of seed. We buy the seed in the UK, we pack it in Ireland and then we sell the seed to our Irish customers and our UK customers. If there’s a hard Brexit, we will no longer be able to do that because we would need to get a seed licence from the Department of Agriculture for every single one of those 200 types of seed to bring them into Ireland before packing and sending them back to the UK. We would also have to get a similar licence from the UK government to sell them there because they’re now being imported back into the country. It’s just not doable.”

Quickcrop plans to source more of their products in the UK so that their Northern Ireland logistics partner can fulfil UK orders without the products ever crossing the border into Ireland.

“The process is designed that the products sold in the UK never actually leave the UK,” Niall adds. “We’ll also have to find a European supplier for our seeds, but we won’t be able to export them into the UK anymore. Seeds are not a big part of our business but it shows the sort of impact Brexit can have.

“If it’s a hard Brexit, there’ll be some hard decisions to be made – but we’re ready for them”

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“We expect Brexit will affect our UK sales by 10–15 percent. To counter that we’re developing a new website aimed very much at the Irish market, and we have other plans as well.”

John Reilly, Head of Enterprise at LEO Sligo, praised the steps Quickcrop has taken to prepare for Brexit. “Quickcrop have had to do a lot of preparation for Brexit,” he says. “They’re maximising lots

of different supports from different agencies such as LEO and InterTrade Ireland, which is a good approach, and we’re confident that they will weather the storm.”

Niall hopes for a soft Brexit but is preparing for a worst-case scenario. He says: “Our UK sales slipped from 62 to 58 percent of our business last year but we grew about 20 percent overall. I’m hoping we can flat-line our UK business this year and get growth of about 30 percent in the Irish market. If it’s a hard Brexit, there’ll be some hard decisions to be made – but we’re ready for them.”

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