

**They're mushrooms...
but not as you know them**

Emily and her sister Hannah are co-founders of the Bristol Mushroom Co. During the pandemic, they experimented with growing edible mushrooms at home as they were keen to bring out a range of plant-based deli foods with mushrooms at their heart. Their products are rather unique and are creating their own space on plant-powered shelves as a delicious, nutritious and satisfying non-meaty food. Bristol Mushroom Co. produces smoked and marinated shiitake mushrooms that make a delicious deli snack, or can add a smokey, bacon-rasher-esque feel to a breakfast toastie or a veggie carbonara.

The sisters used lockdown to experiment with flavours and recipes – they're on their 24th iteration already – and have now locked down their perfect flavour profile for their first, sales-ready product.

How did you become aware of FoodWorks?

Emily said, "We found out about them through Julie from Salsa Stories, another food company that has benefited from FoodWorks South West's help. One of the best bits of advice she gave us, was to consider FoodWorks as a manufacturing site for our mushroom products.

We came in and met Rachel, who gave us a comprehensive tour and breakdown of the types of space, services and expertise that were on offer, from legal and labelling advice to rooms for recipe and product R&D. Rachel also mentioned the hire kitchens, the FESS scheme and the other types of support we would be able to access as a food industry start-up.

What expert advice have you benefited from?

"Initially, we really didn't have a product, more of a good idea that had already improved a lot through home-testing and tweaking. Our main need was help with labelling, as we knew you really had to get that right as a) this is a new type of food product and b) we'd never done anything like this in our lives! We had access to a certain amount of the team's time, and we used most of that getting the label right, namely in relation to the laws around labelling.

This support also informed certain elements of the manufacturing process, around pasteurisation in particular. We also got advice on copyright, trademarking and patenting – what we needed to do and what we didn't need to do.

I also had a little support with our Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point plan (HACCP) from an expert who helped me understand how to approach it.

What rooms or spaces have you used?

"We used the water baths in the dairy and we used FoodWorks' main kitchen. Ideally we would have preferred to hire a smaller test kitchen as we didn't need all that room, but the industry-standard Bradley professional smoker (with lots of racks) that we needed was located in this larger space, as it needed lots of ventilation.

At the moment, we don't have plans to use additional space at FoodWorks but that might change in the future. We are working on our marinades, developing different flavour profiles, and have moved things back to my house until we decide to rent a professional space again. It's likely we'll get a unit where we can grow our own mushrooms and do the research and manufacturing parts of the process all in one space.

**Are you R&D-ing any new innovations?**

"We're continuing with different smoking flavours. Our current product is apple wood-smoked shiitake mushroom slices, marinated in garlic, paprika and toasted sesame oil. We smoke, soak and jar them up in the marinade for people to then fry or cook with at home. They really are deliciously dense, chewy and satisfying, like bacon.

What are your plans for this year and beyond?

"At the moment we're refining future recipes and plan to bring out two more flavours this year. One will be oak-smoked, chilli-flavoured mushrooms; cherry wood-smoked hoisin mushrooms is the other variety. We're also moving sideways into other products like plant-based mushroom gravies.

“It was really helpful to have a big professional kitchen with all the trimmings: different types of utensils, pots, huge pans and machinery. With everything there, we could try various things out to learn exactly what type and size of kit and equipment we'll need to buy when the time comes. We didn't know what we'd need (or not need) for our manufacturing process until we'd done it. Being reassured by those in the know that we are doing the right thing was invaluable, too.”

What are your routes to market?

At the minute, we sell online offering Bristol deliveries only, but we'll move to nationwide delivery soon. You'll also find us at a handful of shops in Bristol plus at food markets and zero waste shops across the South West and South Wales.

Advice to other food businesses considering FoodWorks SW?

"Everyone there is so supportive. They can really help you set off in the right direction, advising on how to streamline your processes and use less energy (in various contexts). There are also lots of other food and drinks businesses and owners around which makes for really interesting networking; we found a new outlet to sell through thanks to a FoodWorks event. We attended a few one-day courses such as product photography, too: something else that all new businesses will need at some point."

Contact details

Contact Emily for more information or visit

<https://bristolmushroom.co.uk/>

