



## Rise and shine with Sunbird Kitchen

**Fiona Dowling is the driving force behind Sunbird Kitchen, her first solo foray into the food production world despite a long career in the sector. Fiona talks about the inspiration behind Sunbird, and where her growing business is heading next.**

### **What are your products?**

“At Sunbird Kitchen, we make small-batch baked granola blends, overnight oat mixes and granola bars that I sell at Farmers’ Markets, indie delis and grocers and supply refill stores. My award-winning granola blends are Cashew and Almond, Pecan and Maple, and Grain-free Granola.”

At 58, I consider myself a bit ancient now, and I’ve always worked in food. My degree is food-related, my first job was in product development for Northern Foods, and I spent most of my career in buying and menu development for Debenhams. Stints in teaching, a move to America and a relocation to London just before the pandemic followed. While in the US, I worked for a female-founded granola business and learned from her how to sell at markets, how to sell online, how to scale things up. The proverbial seed was planted then.

*“Due to a health condition I was advised to steer clear of gluten, dairy and refined sugar, but I couldn’t find any decent gluten-free and refined sugar-free granola. It all tasted like sawdust and cardboard and was sickly sweet. So that’s where my focus went”*



## How did you hear about FoodWorks SW?

“Once, while living in London, I spotted a mention of FoodWorks SW in a chat thread on Facebook’s ‘The Food Hub’ group, where small and scaling-up food businesses can support each other. I thought, ‘that might be useful one day if I ever move back to Bristol’. As soon as we moved back, I looked them up. There were free courses and resources and lots of expertise and help, so I got involved.”



“I had a tour of the whole facility with Simon Gregory and filled out some paperwork, so the team could work out what I needed and how they could help. They can help identify support, funding or courses that you might be eligible for and they hold a lot of information in their heads. They really are a super-experienced team of experts; their advice is invaluable and they can often give some free consultation hours.”

## What in-house facilities or advice did you benefit from?

I did a trial in one of the kitchens - I loved the superfast, state-of-the-art oven - and got help with technical things like the checking of nutritional data and labels. I use software called ‘A la Calc’; FoodWorks’ Zoe Plant logged in to verify that everything was correct for my products.

I took a course in Selling Through Retail and got invaluable insights from Matt Trigg (former buyer with Morrisons and Asda) and Marcus Carter (from the Artisan Food Hub) about how buyers, independent retailers and wholesalers work, and about what people need. I also did free courses in accountancy and online business.

## Advice to new food businesses?

Get involved and make some connections at FoodWorks. Get a tour, look at what events and courses are coming up, explain what you seek to achieve and ask what support or advice is available. The in-house team are very helpful and approachable.

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