



## Case Study: Country Crest



<b>Ownership type</b>	Privately owned by Hoey family.
<b>Business size</b>	Medium.
<b>Core activity</b>	Wash, grade, package and sale of vegetables.
<b>Divisions</b>	Fresh produce; farming; prepared meal solutions; farm shop.
<b>Address</b>	Rathmooney, Lusk.
<b>Age</b>	22 years old.
<b>Generation</b>	Fourth.
<b>Employee no</b>	235 (two family members actively involved).
<b>Turnover range</b>	€40-80M (group turnover).
<b>Export Markets</b>	Northern Ireland and the UK.
<b>Main Brands</b>	Ballymaguire Foods, Country Crest.
<b>Key Finding</b>	Corporate Social Responsibility.

### Company Background

The Hoey family's farming heritage dates back to the 1850's in Lusk, North County Dublin. Fourth generation family members and brothers, Michael and Gabriel Hoey, established Country Crest in 1994. Their main operation was growing and packaging fresh potatoes for the retail sector. As potato consumption dropped the company diversified into onions, and invested €4 million in a state-of-the-art onion grading, packaging and primary storage facility in 2005. In answer to consumer needs, Country Crest began manufacturing and supplying vegetable accompaniments and prepared food and founded their company, Ballymaguire Foods, in 2008. The company is hands-on regarding sustainability and, in 2009, they procured an 80 metre on-site wind turbine that supplies the company with 70% of its energy needs. The Hoey's farm over 3,000 acres, while they oversee another 4,000 acres of crops for other farmers and run a bustling multi-division company that supplies to multiple retailers in Ireland, Northern Ireland and the UK (Musgraves, Booker Group PLC and Food Services UK). Despite its expansive operations, the company ethos revolves around care-giving and environmental reciprocity; a powerful message that is supported by its owner-manager.

### Interview with Michael Hoey

*Managing Director of Country Crest*

#### Family Involvement

Currently, both Gabriel and Michael run the company. However, in the future, Michael sees company management expanding beyond the family unit. *"Our thinking probably would be that Country Crest is bigger than Gabriel and myself and we don't want to stifle the company as such. So there will probably be outside people coming in".* Next generation involvement has not emerged yet but it's something Michael would like to address formally in the near future. *"One thing that I would be very adamant is that they would go somewhere else for a few years and then make up their mind. I don't want to drag anyone in here from college".* This is part of the formal family governance structures Michael hopes to establish. *"We have a very strong board structure that would run the company and keep everything in order from a compliance side of things. So it should be relatively easy to put the family piece onto that then. The regimes and curtailments are in place as such".*



**Managing Director, Michael Hoey**



### Building a brand of credibility and sustainability

By supplying private label, Country Crest's brand was going under the radar. In order to build "a *business-to-business name with credible credentials*", the company opened a farm shop in Jones Garden Centre, Donabate, Dublin. "What we try to do is be accessible to our customer and supplier bases."

Country Crest was one of the first participants in Bord Bia's sustainability programme, Origin Green. Country Crest became a verified Origin Green member, from setting out and meeting strategic objectives and targets for reducing wastage and ensuring energy efficiency. "It's one thing getting it but another thing keeping that accreditation. You have to eat, sleep and drink it every day to keep it in place."

Further to this, Ballymaguire Foods announced the construction of a new food factory in Lusk that will create 100 new jobs following its proposed completion in late 2016.



**Co-founders, Gabriel and Michael Hoey**

***"It's all about long-term strategy.... A company that doesn't have a focus or goal is lost."***

— Michael Hoey

### **Country Crest — Corporate Social Responsibility in Family Business**

Country Crest has a dedicated corporate social responsibility arm led by its co-founder. "I think we've been fortunate and some days you question that and thank God for what we have. It has to be about giving back I think." Country Crest's main charitable project is the Christine Valley Model Farm in Haiti. This idea emerged when Michael, one of a group of Ernst and Young Entrepreneur of the Year finalists, visited Haiti in 2008 to determine a sustainable business approach for the impoverished country. A small developmental farm was set up and Country Crest afforded its expertise, equipment, and technology to local farmers in producing and selling food. The company is long term committed, and continues to send personnel to provide equipment training. There is also a company representative appointed to the Haiti project who visits the country frequently to oversee the project. "It's very important to them that we keep that up and working properly in association with the Soul of Haiti Foundation."

Another project is the Halalele High School in Lesotho, aimed at educating its 300 pupils about the benefits of nourishment, food security and production in a sustainable manner. Together in a partnership with Portmarnock Community School and Action Ireland Trust, Country Crest has developed a gardening training programme with a ten-acre field of potatoes maintained by the school and its pupils.

Furthermore in 2010, Country Crest undertook a 5-10 year project aimed at achieving self-sufficiency among a community of 2000 farmers in Lesotho. Country Crest strives to enable local villages in the Temo Moho area to grow and sell certified seed potatoes to other potato producers for ware production in the lowlands and for export.

At home, Country Crest supports multiple groups and projects including Senior Citizen organisations, and Crosscare, a homeless charity to which they provide a weekly donation of vegetables.