



Case study: Keelings



Ownership type	Privately owned by Keeling family.
Business size	Large.
Core activities	Growing, sourcing, shipping, marketing and distributing fruit, vegetables, flowers.
Divisions	Keelings Retail, Keelings Market, Keelings Farm Fresh, Keelings International and Keelings Solutions.
Address	FoodCentral, St. Margaret's.
Age	42 years.
Generation	Third.
Employee no	2,282 (three family members actively involved).
Turnover range	€100M+ (group turnover).
International bases	UK, Netherlands.
Export Markets	Keelings Asia & Africa (fresh produce solutions)
Main Brand	"Love to Grow"
Key Finding	Process innovation.

Company Background

In 1926, the grandparents of the current Keeling siblings began growing rhubarb on their land in St. Margaret's, Fingal, North County Dublin. Soon the family were producing apples, strawberries and tomatoes and exporting flower bulbs to the UK. Throughout the 1940's, the business operated as a small farm producer, selling their products at the Dublin Fruit market. The second generation became involved and son, Joe Keeling, established Keelings wholesale in 1973. From growing own produce, Keelings transitioned to buying from growers, both nationally and globally, and selling to independent retailers and the services and catering industries. In the 1980's, the farm expanded and Keelings became a fresh food supplier for national supermarkets including Dunnes Stores and Quinnsworth. Supermarket retail gradually overtook the wholesale side and their product range expanded. Keelings is an exemplar of rapid expansion; from its humble beginnings the company now boasts five divisions, imports from 42 countries, and operates in European, Asian and African markets.

Interview with David Keeling

CEO Keelings Retail

Family Involvement

Despite the company's expansion, the family remains largely involved in management and ownership. Joe Keeling remains in the business as Chairman. His daughter, Caroline is CEO and part of her overall management is developing Keelings Solutions, the ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) facet of the business. Joe's son, William, is property director and oversees the businesses in the UK. His other son, David leads the retail side from FoodCentral.

David had this to say on the sibling-manager dynamic: *"I think it has worked very well that we've tended to have our own areas that we've worked in and developed."*



CEO Keelings Retail, David Keeling



Family governance is an important feature of Keelings which has a family charter in place and holds shareholder meetings four times a year. The separation of family and business issues is clearly defined: *"We've got a business that has almost 2000 staff so it's very important that it's run as a business and not as a family."*

"It's very often run on the basis of what's good for the business. That's the key to success for the business as well as having a lot of very good people."

— David Keeling

Year	Keelings Direct	Agency	Total	Total FTE
2011	1746	367	2113	2040
2012	1666	391	2057	1979
2013	1700	477	2177	2082
2014	1767	483*	2250	2105
2015	1845	437**	2282	2238

Employment Numbers (2011-2015)

* Higher % agency staff working 20 hours per week
 ** Drop in agency as greater % working full-time hours



Keelings — Process Innovation in Family Business

The drive for innovation features across each of the three Keeling generations; from fruit growing and glasshouse production, to the wholesale business, to a large international portfolio company. *"It's a combination of many people's ideas and hard work and then we probably make particularly quick decisions. We're relatively entrepreneurial"*, says David. Keelings lead the way in pioneering processes for fruit production in Ireland. *"The drive for innovation comes from the pressure from consumers and retailers to continually get better every time"*.

In the 1980's, Joe Keeling requested daily data on company profits which led to the development of the Keelings ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) system software. This incremental innovation was developed over 30 years and in 2011, Keelings Solutions was established and the software came on the market. This division sells industry-focused solutions in stock management, sales and procurement management, warehouse and production planning, quality assurance and food safety management. Their experience of food production formed a sound basis for their progression into system management: *"We're not just selling our system; we're selling our expertise and how to run a produce business"*.

Keelings has made strides in infrastructural innovation, opening Ireland's National Food Park, FoodCentral, in 2010. *"We just looked at our site and could see there were a number of benefits in being located where we are"*. This 113 hectare food industry park is ideally located, in proximity to Dublin Airport, Port Tunnel and M50 motorway. One of the company's major developments was their state-of-the-art glasshouses that extend the growing season from March to December. Keelings provide a significant percentage of all Irish-grown peppers.