

How Fresh As is adding crunch to cuisine

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FREEZE-DRIED BERRIES (PHOTO: FACEBOOK/FACEBOOK)

Every week on The Primer we ask a local business or product to introduce themselves in eight simple takes. This week we talk to Fresh As founder Tommy Roff whose company freeze-dries everything from mandarins and feijoas to liquorice and Red Bull.

ONE: How did Fresh As start and what was the inspiration behind it?

I had a produce wholesale business supplying restaurants and was constantly having trouble sourcing a good supply of French tarragon. I'd been shown some freeze dried chives 10 years earlier and, after a bit of a bender, the dots somehow joined up. I think my diminished capacity [from the bender] allowed my brain to do some creative dot-joining.

TWO: Did you have any interest/experience in business or entrepreneurship prior to starting Fresh As?

I've always been self-employed. I ran my produce business, Lettuce Deliver, for about 15 years prior to establishing Fresh As.

THREE: What are the main benefits of freeze-dried food?

The key advantage of using freeze-drying technology is that we remove the moisture without the addition of much heat. Most other drying techniques use heat to remove the moisture, which in essence cooks the moisture out. Because of this, freeze-dried products retain a fresh, rather than cooked flavour.

The other great thing is texture. Freeze-dried fruit is crunchy which gives chefs the ability to provide a textural element to a dish that wouldn't be possible with conventional fruit.

FOUR: What sort of technology/machinery do you use to freeze dry your products?

All of our freeze dryers are built in Blenheim by a New Zealand company called Cuddon. Freeze dryers can be very temperamental and Cuddon has been very supportive.



FREEZE-DRIED BLACKCURRENT POWDER, WHOLE RASPBERRIES, PLUM SLICES AND RASPBERRY PANNA COTTA (PHOTO: FACEBOOK/FRESH AS)

FIVE: What's the strangest thing you've tried to freeze dry? Is there anything you've tried to freeze dry but didn't work out?

I see ourselves as a foodservice company that also produces retail. As such, most of our resources are aimed at producing interesting products for chefs so we predominantly try to produce products that offer chefs a textural difference.

We freeze dry liquorice into a product that has the texture of meringue, allowing the chef to use the liquorice in a different application. We also freeze dry things like sake, gin and tonic, coffee, balsamic vinegar, manuka honey – pretty much anything you can think of. We even freeze-dried Red Bull for a restaurant owned by I think the creator of Red Bull in Austria.

We can freeze dry pretty much anything. The only items I've struggled with are products like butter or oil.



FRESH AS FREEZE DRIED GARLIC POWDER, FREEZE DRIED SWEET BASIL, FREEZE DRIED OREGANO POWDER, AND FRESH AS FREEZE DRIED THYME POWDER (PHOTO: FACEBOOK/FRESH AS)

SIX: Tell us about some of your key customers so far and how they go about using Fresh As products. We supply our products all around the globe. We've sold products to the Jordanian royal family and I was been told that "her royal highness was pleased" in regards to trying our mandarin segments. We were also contacted by Victoria Beckham's personal chef who told us that "Ms Beckham loves Fresh As". We also sell to many of the worlds best restaurants and to many local companies like Whittakers (ie: Hawke's Bay Black Doris Plum chocolate block) and Hubbards.

SEVEN: Do you have any other plans to scale/grow further and if so, what are they?

My basic business model is to try and produce quality products that people want. If I achieve this and people want to keep buying my products, then I'll expand as required.

EIGHT: Lastly, tell us about a New Zealand start-up or business that you really admire right now.

I don't really follow too much of what other companies are doing. I admire anyone that's in a start-up and sticks to it because it isn't really that easy to do. I also admire clarity of direction. A company should know who they are and what they want to do.