



FROM LEFT: Neil, Denise and Emma

# We're on a roll

**H**OLLINGS is in an advantageous position because it can react very quickly to customer requests, in part because it is a small family firm, said sales and marketing manager Emma Hollings.

Apart from Emma – who has pretty much grown up in the offices of the pet treats manufacturer, seeing as Hollings was set up by her parents Jeff and Celia when she was just a toddler – Neil



Grainger came on board early last year as operations manager, and latest recruit Denise Wylie has taken on the role of sales coordinator.

“We all overlap and liaise with each other all the time,” said Emma, each having their own strengths to make a strong team. Denise has been tasked with growing existing accounts and looking after customers while Neil is the link between the manufacturing and production facilities, overseeing production.

Hollings has a portfolio of over 100 products, and these past six months have seen it concentrating on

**Hollings has launched the Supergiant range of 100% natural dog treats**

**Dog treats manufacturer Hollings has seen steady growth in the sale of its natural treats. The family-run business has invested heavily in its three sites and has seen output reach incredible volumes**

growing its sales with existing customers. “We have been analysing what products our customers currently take, and what they could add to make their offering stronger,” said Emma. On average, their customers take a good 50% of its range.

“We have a very good relationship with our customers,” she added. “Because they know and trust us, they are more willing to try new products.”

Emma and Denise attended Pedigree Wholesale’s trade show, and Denise said: “It was lovely to meet so many of our customers and to see how happy they are with the brand.”

Jeff and Celia started Hollings in 1979 making dry dog food Tyke Gold, buying the current Skipton, North Yorks, premises in 1981. In 1995, Jeff fulfilled a wholesaler’s request for dried pig ears and installed a drying room, and the treats train was launched.

In 2004, they bought a 10,000sq ft purpose-built production facility in Worksop, Notts, which is now where all Hollings’ treat products are made. Growth has led to its expansion to 30,000sq ft. “Many different companies are doing natural treats, but we believe we have strongest range,” said Emma. “We have a very, very strong customer base and a strong range, and we believe we are in the best position.”



**Christmas is a busy time at Hollings with production starting in late summer**

At Worksop, treats including roast knuckles, beef ribs and marrow bones are cooked in any of the seven cooking vessels, at the rate of about 120 tonnes each week. Hollings also has a large range of dried products including the aforementioned pig ears, pork skin, pork and lamb bones, pizzles and pig snouts. There are five drying rooms as some products are dried in 24 hours, but others can take up to seven days. Hollings also has three smoking rooms for its smoked treats.

The numbers are mind-blowing – more than 100,000 marrow bones are, for instance, cut, cooked, cleaned, whitened and dried every week, with capacity for up to 200,000 per week at busy times.

The team is conscious that customers like to see new products, and recent introductions include the Sprats fish treats and the Supergiant range of pork and beef treats. Buffalo horns from South America have also been popular, she added.

As far as possible, Hollings sources as much of its raw material from the UK or a long-term dedicated



EU supplier – the UK simply cannot supply all the raw material it needs. Full traceability is of utmost importance, said Emma.

Although packaged treats are growing more popular, she said, packaging comes in every shape and size, from prepacks and shelf-ready display boxes to resealable carrier bags and bulk boxes.

### THE WAY FORWARD

Hollings actually occupies three sites, which employ 60 staff. Skipton houses the office, warehouse and packaging facility in a 25,000sq ft site, while across the road is a 5,000sq ft factory producing its dog food and two small animal brands (Bobtail and Pipkin) – output on all three tops 40 tonnes a week. The Workshop site is an-hour-and-a-half away, with deliveries of cooked produce arriving at Skipton every day to be packaged, to the rough count of a quarter of a million packets every week.

“It is a huge volume,” says Neil. Pigs ears are still the highest volume, with around 20 million pieces being packaged and sold every year.

A new state-of-the-art shrink wrap machine costing £40,000 has upped efficiencies in wrapping the products, with daily output easily in the 10,000-12,000 range. This on top of the output from two pre-existing shrink wrap machines, which are used for less complicated shapes.

In addition to these machines, Skipton has seven packing lines. Automation is not about saving labour, said Neil, but about increasing capacity, efficiency and output per person. “We are always willing to invest in automation to be more efficient.”

Despite such volumes, the vast majority of all sales are into the

UK; very little is exported. With sales growing healthily year on year, exports are low on the agenda.

Private label is booming, accounting for roughly half of total production.

“Stock control is very important and a lot of what I do,” he said. “My end goal is about customer service, to deliver quality products on time, every time.” To this end, the company keeps about 600 pallets of finished stock at any one time.

Defra-accredited, the company prides itself on its fast response and turnaround. It recently received an urgent order for a private label filled bone – Hollings was able to fulfill the order within 48 hours.

It’s about sticking with what you know, which is why Hollings is concentrating on dogs and not looking at cats. “We’re still seeing so much growth with what we do,” said Neil.

Social media has made the world a smaller place,

and brings owners directly into touch with manufacturers. As a result, Facebook has become as important as the website as a communication and marketing tool. “Owners like the direct contact,” said Denise. “Social media and eshots are the way forward.”

It’s said ‘Imitation is the best form of flattery’, and that means the team has to stay on top of innovation as others follow on their heels. Not surprisingly, Emma reveals there are several new launches in the pipeline, including growing its fish offering and 100% natural range. She said: “People want to see new products. Our challenge is to stay on top of our competition, and we have a lot of competition. But we have been in the trade for a long time,

and we have seen a lot of people come and go, a lot of movement.

“Despite this, there’s very steady growth of natural treats. If you go into any good retailer, you’ll see a really strong range of treats. We’ve worked hard on our packaging, to create bright shelf-ready packaging and display boxes, and we have created a really strong showcase of products. It all helps the retailer.” ■



**Bagged treats are popular among customers**



Products being packed



Hollings is actively investing in automation



Many staff have been with Hollings for years



Warehouse is stacked close and high