

IW Rural Fund - Case Study - 2016

Isle of Wight Distillery – Xavier Baker & Conrad Gauntlett



“Our grant has allowed us to move up to a more professional and sustainable level. The quality and longevity of our Spirits will be optimised as our volume production increases, so we can market our spirits further afield and explore export opportunities with confidence. “

When a passion for producing quality drink products brings together an experienced brewer and the owner of an Isle of Wight vineyard many an evening is bound to be spent dreaming up new and exciting beverages...of an alcoholic nature of course! So it was not until 2016 the Island’s first distillery was opened but all that planning was not wasted! In just months of operation the IW Distillery began winning national awards for its range of high quality and unique products - creating a stir in this its first year, some even before the barrels have been opened!

Recognising huge growth in the food and beverage sector for premium high end products especially with traceability or connection with a local territory, the IW Distillery creates niche small batch products unashamedly making provenance part of its USP. Wight Mermaid Gin is flavoured with foraged coastal botanics; IW Whisky has a unique locally brewed base using IW barley and is already the subject of a ‘waiting list’ three years before being ready! Wight Rock Vodka is also a local grain based spirit but the latest product has an even more interesting local story. ‘Victory Navy-strength Gin’ named after the illustrious Portsmouth-based warship, is 57% proof and made under licence for the Royal Navy National Museum. A limited edition version of Victory with a unique blend of botanicals, is currently being aged in bespoke oak barrels containing a slither of HMS Victory wood and is designed to recreate the taste and style of gin drunk at the Battle of Tragalgar.

The expertise and passion producing these unique products combined with skilful, creative marketing has seen demand far exceed initial expectations, with customers across the Isle of Wight, along the south coast and far beyond. With the current trend and interest in gin and due to be featured by a leading gin subscription company, a need for early expansion was clear, There had already been significant investment in setting up the distillery but the IW Rural Fund grant has provided a range of equipment including high-spec specialist osmosis & filtration systems which ensure consistency of quality and taste. Capping machinery increases efficiency as well as catering for miniatures bottles which both extends the market as tasters & gifts and attracts higher margins. This support in the early phase of the company’s existence has helped avoid any loss of momentum at a crucial stage for this young company.



The 2 full time jobs created have been to support production and sales/marketing activities.