

Food and Footprint

Case Study

Empowering Scotland's next generation of food and drink entrepreneurs



Early-stage entrepreneurs in the food and drink sector often face considerable challenges navigating the complexities of launching a successful business – from product development and food safety compliance to branding, market strategy, and scaling. For many, the lack of access to specialised knowledge, industry contacts, and business planning tools creates barriers to growth at a critical time in their journey.

The customer challenge

SAC Consulting (part of SRUC) partnered with the Scottish Centre for Food Development and Innovation (SCFDI) based at Queen Margaret University (QMU) to deliver THRIVE, an intensive, expert-led training programme designed to support students, graduates, and micro-SMEs across Scotland's food and drink and rural sectors. Funded by the Scottish Funding Council, the programme aims to build confidence, competence, and connections among Scotland's emerging food entrepreneurs.

One such entrepreneur was Joanna Davies, founder of Canny Mushrooms. Joanna joined the THRIVE programme in 2024 with a clear and creative business idea – tinned mushrooms full of flavour and high-quality ingredients – but Joanna had little experience in the food industry. With a background in project management and a passion for food sustainability, Joanna had identified a gap in the market for preserved mushrooms that are both flavourful and convenient but needed help transforming her concept into a viable product. Having recently relocated to



Edinburgh; she also faced the dual challenge of entering a new sector and building new networks. She turned to THRIVE for accessible expert support, technical insight, and peer collaboration.

Our solution

Spearheaded by SAC Consulting's Food and Enterprise team and experts from SCFDI, the THRIVE programme blends practical learning with expert advice and peer networking. THRIVE provided Joanna – and other early-stage entrepreneurs – with practical guidance across the key pillars of launching a food business: product development, food legislation, manufacturing, business planning, and market strategy.

During the programme experts provided personalised support tailored to her specific business idea, helping her navigate food legislation, product development, and business planning. Joanna gained particular value from the programme's collaborative delivery model and access to expert



networks. Alongside the team from SCFDI, Joanna was able to trial and refine her recipes using specialised canning equipment that wouldn't have been available in a home kitchen. As a newcomer to both the Scottish food industry and Edinburgh, Joanna benefited from THRIVE's encouragement to attend local trade shows and events. These opportunities, combined with the relationships she formed with fellow food entrepreneurs during the programme, helped her to establish a supportive network that has continued beyond the programme.

Another defining moment was the pitching opportunity at the end of THRIVE. This helped with articulation of her business story, with structured and constructive feedback from an experienced industry panel and allowed her to build real momentum as she moved toward launch. Throughout the programme, she also benefited from tailored advice and ongoing access to the THRIVE materials.

Added value for the customer

By participating in THRIVE, Joanna not only gained practical knowledge and clarity around her business idea but also developed a stronger understanding of how to operate sustainably and in line with industry standards. She is one of over 100 food and drink entrepreneurs who have taken part in THRIVE since it launched four years ago. The connections made during the programme have supported ongoing growth and introduced her to a valuable community of peers and mentors.

In June 2025, Joanna reached a significant milestone with the completion of her first production run, launching three products

under the Canny Mushrooms brand. This achievement was made possible through connections established via THRIVE – particularly the manufacturing sessions, which led her to the unique facilities at The Food Incubator in Leicester. With trademark approval in place, packaging finalised, and market stalls booked in Edinburgh, Joanna is now bringing her vision to life.

THRIVE continues to deliver impact by equipping food and drink entrepreneurs across Scotland with the confidence and tools to succeed. By drawing on SAC Consulting's technical expertise and QMU's academic excellence, the programme is building a new wave of sustainable, innovative, and competitive Scottish food businesses.

Our customer says

"I had a fantastic experience on the THRIVE programme and thoroughly recommend it to other aspiring food and drink entrepreneurs at any stage of the start-up journey. The programme covered a great breadth of topics and provided me with so much of the information I needed to start a new food business, without any prior experience in the food industry. THRIVE is a super resource, and I'm confident I will continue to refer back to the materials for many years to come."

Joanna Davies

Founder, Canny Mushrooms

