

# Manufacturing in Ireland 2023

Unlocking Ireland's manufacturing potential for the next manufacturing evolution

O'Brien Fine Foods case study 2023



## A strategy of innovation and growth

**“We always, first and foremost, want to make the best quality product we can. We focus on three pillars: better sourced, better made and better for you.”**

John O’Brien, Managing Director of O’Brien Fine Foods, talks about how the company has evolved in its innovation over the years and how Ireland has become more competitive.

## A strategy of innovation and growth

Ireland has not only become a centre for manufacturing in sectors such as biopharmaceuticals, electronics, and medical technology, but it also acts as a hub for food manufacturing. The country’s rich agricultural traditions, along with its temperate climate, ensure a steady supply of high-quality raw materials.

One company exceeding standards in this sector is O’Brien Fine Foods, an intergenerational family-owned company based in Co Kildare. Employing over 700 people, they specialise in the manufacture and marketing of premium meats. Over the past twenty years, their business has grown to become the leading producer of cooked meats in Ireland, with a growing presence in the UK. Operating from three BRC approved manufacturing facilities in Kildare, Westmeath and London, they supply both branded and private label ranges to retailers across Ireland and the UK. Their branded portfolio includes Brady Family, a household name and Ireland’s No. 1 cooked meats brand, Green Farm, Ireland’s No 1 white meat brand and Bearfields of London, a traditional ham and gammon business in the UK.

John O’Brien, Managing Director of O’Brien Fine Foods, says manufacturing firms, particularly in the food sector, play a pivotal role in both the economy and community of Ireland. “The business was originally set up in the late 70’s by Ossie and Mary Brady,” says John. But when John’s parents, Bill and Patricia O’Brien, bought the business in 2000, it had a massive growth spurt. Under his family’s guidance, O’Brien Fine Foods grew to become “the biggest producer of cooked meats on the island of Ireland”.

“One in every two packs of cooked meats that are sold in Ireland are made by us.” The company caters to several large retailers in Ireland, producing both branded and own-label cooked meats for outlets like Dunnes Stores, Tesco, SuperValu, Lidl and BWG.

Product innovation has always been at the heart of their strategy. John, who joined the business in 2003 and became Managing Director in 2014, says they are committed to delivering top-quality manufactured products, “We always, first and foremost, want to make the best quality product we can. We focus on three pillars: better sourced, better made, and better for you.

“For example, we source Bord Bia quality-assured pork, and we try to make the product with minimal waste and a lower carbon footprint, with nearly all our packaging being 90% recyclable. We also strive to make our products better for consumers by improving their nutritional profile where we can, such as by reducing the salt content.”

## **A hub for manufacturing**

When asked about Ireland as a manufacturing hub, John is very positive about the advantages of being located here, “The support that you get in Ireland is top class.”

He credits organisations like Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland for playing pivotal roles in nurturing businesses like his. “They have helped with everything from consumer research, to supporting us with our team development, training, and even capital grants to help us build our factory. Ireland is becoming commercially attractive to many businesses and is increasingly trading on an all-island basis.”

There is also a large talent pool in Ireland with highly educated and experienced people. “It’s all about retaining that talent. We entered the Kildare Chamber Awards this year and are finalists in three categories to not only highlight our business to our consumers, but also to attract and retain the best talent.”

In fact, they are the biggest indigenous employer in North Kildare. But a company like this has also had a significant impact on the community beyond employment. O’Brien Fine Foods sponsors local sports teams such as Kildare GAA, LGFA and Camogie and actively works with charities like Barretstown, which offers respite for children with serious illnesses. They have also collaborated with organisations such as Food Cloud to redistribute surplus food to those who need it.





## Supporting manufacturing

It's not just talent and supportive organisations which have helped Ireland to become a manufacturing hub. There are also plenty of government policies that influence the manufacturing industry.

John says pension auto-enrolment, which is due to be rolled out in the country next year and aims to enrol every working person into a pension scheme, is "the right thing to do. There is also the recent introduction of statutory sick pay which is a great addition."

He also mentions the environmental aspect, citing the challenge of farm-level emissions. He believes that a unified approach from every stakeholder in the supply chain can significantly address this issue, though he emphasizes the government's role in steering this joint effort effectively.

"There are things that add costs to businesses, and I hope we continue to work with the government closely heading into the future." As for this future, John says he sees continuous growth for O'Brien Fine Foods in Ireland and beyond. "We want to grow into the UK, consolidate our position in Ireland, improve our sustainability targets, and always create a place where people love to come and work."

**John O'Brien,**  
**Managing Director of O'Brien Fine Foods**





## About Ibec

Ibec is Ireland's largest lobby group and business representative. We campaign for real changes to the policies that matter most to business. Policy is shaped by our diverse membership, who are home grown, multinational, big and small and employ 70% of the private sector workforce in Ireland.

With 39 trade associations covering a range of industry sectors, 6 offices around Ireland as well as an office in Brussels. With over 300 employees, Ibec communicates the Irish business voice to key stakeholders at home and abroad. Ibec also provides a wide range of professional services and management training to members on all aspects of human resource management, occupational health and safety, employee relations and employment law.

## Ibec Trade Associations

### Representing your industry

Representing your industry Ibec understands that every business is different. There are the general issues which face all businesses operating in Ireland and then there are the issues specific to individual sectors or categories of the economy. To reflect the distinct interests of all our members, there are 39 business associations within the Ibec group. Ibec's trade associations identify and champion issues of importance to their respective members and provide great knowledge sharing, networking, and training for all these industries.

Ibec's trade associations are strong brands in their own right and those that represent the manufacturing sector include:

- BiopharmaChem Ireland
- Irish MedTech Association
- Technology Ireland
- Property Industry Ireland [Building Materials Federation]
- Engineering Industries Ireland
- Food Drink Ireland
- Drinks Ireland

**#ManufacturinginIreland**  
**[www.Ibec.ie/manufacturinginireland](http://www.Ibec.ie/manufacturinginireland)**



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