

Bright future for artisanal yoghurt

When you spot Sara Färlin Tynelius at work in her small-scale dairy facility outside Sjöbo in the south of Sweden, suited up in her lab coat outfit, she might strike you as someone who has been in this business forever. But her career path as a self-employed organic yoghurt producer is but five years in the making. And she is actually a native of the capital, more than 500 km north.

- My husband and I both have degrees in environmental engineering, he commuted weekly to a job in Denmark while I was stuck in Stockholm. You could say love was the reason for us to permanently relocate down south, Sara explains. Sara found a position at an energy company in Malmö, but her passion for the environment and a long-nurtured dream to run her own business gnawed at her. In the beginning of 2015, with the support of her partner Gustaf, she decided it was time to turn her aspirations into reality.

- To start a micro dairy actually wasn't that much of a long shot for us, Sara says, Gustaf worked for a bakery business and knew the food industry and with both of us being engineers, everything surrounding dairy machines and equipment in fact felt intriguing. But we really wanted to work with something locally sourced, and perceived that there was a lack of artisanal dairy products on the market, Sara points out.

However, Sara wanted to embark on the journey with some more in-depth knowledge of the field, albeit planning for a modest venture, so she decided to sign up for a class in dairy technology. In addition to the nuts and bolts of how to set up and run your own processing plant, she also garnered something

even more important from the classroom – contacts. She got to know someone who knew plumbing and heating,



'Elsekjell' artisanal organic yoghurt with sea buckthorn and apple topping.



Sara Färlin Tynelius in her micro dairy facility.

another one who had retired from Tetra Pak with a background in packaging, and made friends with yet more savvy people who would help her get the ball rolling. Simultaneously, Sara and her husband were looking for a new place to settle, with some hard-met criteria; closer to nature, close to an organic dairy farm that could provide them with milk, and also capable of accommodating a small food processing facility. Just south of the town of Sjöbo, they struck gold when a childhood friend of Gustaf's helped them find a farm - going by the name of *Elsekjellshus* – that would suit them perfectly. - The place had an annex that had served as an interior design shop, and we imagined it could be converted into a small dairy factory. Around this time we also got our first child, and it was a must for me to be able to work from home, Sara emphasizes.

In 2015, after many months of overhauling, setting up and connecting all the equipment, getting the organic certification and fine-tuning the culture, the first batch of yoghurt was ready for delivery. The response from the first customers and retailers was unequivocally positive – this yoghurt really was something extra. The plain, "natural" yoghurt was soon accompanied by on-the-go portion size products with organic and savoury fruit toppings, and one with handmade granola from a nearby bakery.

-All the fruit and grains are of course sourced from the vicinity, Sara asserts, and we buy the raspberries from my father-in-law!

For Sara and her venture, the ongoing pandemic has entailed an ever-increasing demand for the Elsekjell range. In times of uncertainty people seem to change their consumer behaviour and search out more genuine and local products. On a yearly basis, she now produces about 15.000 liters of yoghurt, still only catering to visitors and local shops.

But what about the future? Well, an upgraded and faster packing tool is on the horizon, making it easier to keep the optimal temperature throughout the process, and several more stores are lined up for stocking Sara's yoghurts. Also, there's that never-ending endeavor to minimize the environmental impact of the products.

- All our machines are refurbished second hand ones, and the dairy spaces are heated with fire wood. But I would really like to see all our packaging become plant based and biodegradable, Sara says.

As one of the participants of the transnational Leader project *CIRCLE*, Sara is looking forward to meet her peers from Sweden, Luxemburg and Finland who are also striving to reduce their ecological footprint whilst creating better financial outcomes for their businesses.

- I'm hoping for many interesting exchanges, and new circular ways of thinking about Elsekjell, Sara concludes.