



## GOING GLOBAL

# Big dry to Big Apple

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**T**HERE should be a law against it, combining two of the most addictive food products known into the one package.

But the result is "sublime", said the marketing manager of Seatonfire Chilli Chocolate, Jason O'Connor.

Rather than a food conflict, there's the perfect symmetry of the deep, rich taste of chocolate followed by the overwhelming sensation of the chilli, he said.

And from a place called Lazy Acres, near Murphy's Creek, just outside Toowoomba in Queensland, Seatonfire is to take its devilishly-hot chilli chocolate to the world.

The chocolate, which comes in "mild" milk chocolate (which gets a four out of 10 hotness rating on the Scoville scale) and "wild" dark chocolate (nine out of 10) forms, piqued the interest of confectionery buyers from London to Tokyo to New York at last month's Fine Food Australia exhibition in Sydney.

Mr O'Connor, who left behind a 15-year marketing career in Melbourne to found Seatonfire with his chocolatier mother Lynne Seaton-Anderson, will be in the Big Apple this week talking distribution deals, followed by other business trips to London and Tokyo.

"It's very exciting for a little farm in the middle of nowhere

to be able to have this product available to the world," Mr O'Connor said.

While he was running business development for global fashion and jewellery brands — as well as running his own wedding planning business — the family farm back in Queensland was feeling the effects of the never-ending drought.

The cattle operations ceased, but the farm's hardy 10-year-old chilli plantation prospered in the big dry.

Mother and son then hatched a plan to fill a gap in the global market for a block of chocolate with true bite.

"The Aztecs have been blending chocolate and chilli for a gazillion years but we did a tour through Belgium and France last year and looked at what's available in the market and there was nothing with the effect of ours," he said.

Mrs Seaton-Anderson has been making the chilli chocolate for about six years, and the trip to Europe last year made her and her son realise just how well she was doing it.

"We did a lot of chocolate eating," Mr O'Connor said, "and we realised that what she was doing was great.

"But we also realised we needed to introduce Belgian Courverture chocolate, and better packaging."

He said the Seatonfire edge is the chillis, which are grown chemical-free and therefore they don't give the chocolate a bitter taste.

Until the trip to Europe, Mrs Seaton-Anderson had been selling her chilli products — including chutneys, jams, chilli lime cordial (for vodka and ice) and chilli extract (for bloody marys) — in the local farmers markets.

"We now sell the chocolate online ([www.seatonfire.com](http://www.seatonfire.com)) and we're looking for national and international stockists," Mr O'Connor said.

It's only been a year since development of the company began, with the company officially formed in April.

The packaging and branding was only finished a month before the Sydney Fine Food Exhibition, but they still reflect Mr O'Connor's own experience in pitching to the style-conscious, high-value end of the market.

"The packaging's been designed as a gifting item to accompany a bottle of wine at a dinner party or a thank you or a happy birthday or whatever," he said.

"The promise of something beautiful is what we're projecting with this product — but the product inside is the most exciting part."

"It's really a gourmet product and it needs to be carefully positioned," he said.

The company expects its key markets to be those which have had a marked lift in chocolate imports, namely the US, the UK, Korea and Japan.

However, he insists Seatonfire will take its time sewing up distribution, looking for

"the perfect fit" with partners to represent it globally.

Mr O'Connor said he and his mother had some big plans for the company.

"Within three years we aim to have the chilli chocolate in every ski field in the world," he said.

"And we have two products in development, a hot [as in chilli hot] chocolate cocoa and a hot chocolate sauce."

Mr O'Connor said that he did not deliberately set out to garner international trade before establishing the company locally, it was just the way things happened.

"Our first interviews were at the Fine Food Exhibition in Sydney," he said. "We were part of the Austrade group and it brought international buyers to us which is how we got the leads."

While Seatonfire has gained some interest from David Jones locally, Austrade chief economist Tim Harcourt said the company was an example of a company that was "born global".

"Those businesses succeed internationally without having to 'make it' first locally, like Seatonfire, which has decided to pursue exports first rather than establishing success in Australia first," Mr Harcourt said.

"Global brands can be built from small local companies — especially in rural and regional Australia."



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Sublime . . . Jason O'Connor (top right) and his chilli chocolate

