

Crowd funding enables purchase of Dunedin chocolate factory

Over less than two days New Zealanders opened their wallets and purchased Dunedin-based chocolate company OCHO, championing a new people-led model of regional development.

3570 people from across New Zealand purchased shares to the value of \$2,000,000 which will allow OCHO to expand its production and create new jobs.

This community-driven initiative began as a response to Mondelez announcing it planned to close Dunedin's Cadbury factory. Initially Jim O'Malley and a team of volunteers aimed to purchase the Cadbury factory to keep confectionery production in the city. However, 'Own the Factory' has advanced its strategy to focus on premium chocolate-making, joining forces with independently owned OCHO and in the process developing a model for community business ownership to contribute to regional development.

Campaign leader Jim O'Malley said people had spoken to him about investing in OCHO to ensure Dunedin retained its proud history of chocolate production. They also wanted to enable new jobs in the city. "We achieved our aim of attracting multiple shareholders and are delighted to have more than 3700 owners."

He said the offer was different to usual shares as it limited the total any one person could own to 11% so that no single investor could dominate. The constitution also prevents OCHO moving its production outside of Dunedin.

OCHO founder Liz Rowe, who is the General Manager of the new company, says the first task will be ordering new chocolate production equipment from Italy. Once the order is confirmed planning will start on fitting out a new OCHO chocolate factory in Dunedin's Steamer Basin. "New equipment and a larger facility will enable us to expand our production from 90kgs of chocolate a week to up to a maximum of 200kgs a day, she said."

OCHO's plan for the first year is to focus on increasing production. Once that has been achieved the company will develop a tourism component with a factory tour and chocolate tastings. The third phase of its strategy is developing export markets.

An establishment board has been appointed to lead OCHO for the first 12 months the board is; Jim O'Malley, Vito Iannece and Stewart Cowan from Dunedin and Tami Louisson from Wellington.