

## Americans go crackers for Kiwi gourmet food

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Jan Meyer talks with Prime Minister John Key at the new Lower Hutt plant

Perseverance has finally paid off for Wellington gourmet food company Rutherford & Meyer.

The maker of cheese wafers and fruit pates reports it is third-time lucky with its attempts to crack the United States market.

Previously, the company had struggled in the US when one distributor stopped selling its stock and another dealer did not pay his bills, costing it tens of thousands of dollars.

But a third US distributor was taken over by a larger firm, giving the Wellington business, which employs 20, access to many major supermarkets.

Together with sales across Canada, the company has been enjoying annual growth of 60% a year since 2008.

“That’s still the tip of the iceberg as to what we can do,” director Jan Meyer says.

Rutherford & Meyer also exports to Hong Kong and Singapore but only expats enjoy the products rather than the locals.

High tariffs made selling to Europe uneconomic but exports make up 70% of the company's annual revenue, which is likely to double to \$6 million this year.

Earlier this year, Rutherford & Meyer opened a new \$1 million plant in Lower Hutt and Ms Meyer says further products, which will add to a recently launched gluten-free range, are in development.

The company started in 1996 when Ms Meyer's mother Alison and her friend Rutherford, from two North Canterbury farming families, began making pates with surplus fruit.

The cottage industry blossomed and Ms Meyer and her husband Russell Coventry took over the business in 2001.

The more recent growth has led Ms Meyer to be nominated for the 2012 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award, whose winners will be announced on October 18.