



grassroots
young entrepreneurs in eco-health tourism

My Goodness Food, Ireland

Food to Make You Feel
Good!



www.mygoodnessfood.com





My Goodness Food

Ireland

Thematic area:
Vegetarian Health Focused Foods

“In Mahon Farmers’ Market, we are a tight community. A lot of us have worked together for years through hail and wind and always find a way to push each other to be our very best.

What Type of Business is My Goodness?

My Goodness is a vegan health-focused food company specialising in living, probiotic vegan, raw, sugar-free, gluten-free, and fermented probiotic foods. Founded in 2015 by Virginia and Dónal O’Gara, the company emphasises ethical practices and sustainability, sourcing local and organic ingredients wherever possible.

‘We are a café and food producer located in the Cork English Market. We celebrate Ireland’s greatest natural resource, rain, by making delicious probiotic drinks from it. We harvest the rainwater to make a vast range of sparkling kefir and kombucha. We use vegetables from top to tail to create pestos, pates, krauts, crackers, & cake’.

They are known for their innovative use of rainwater in their fermented products like kombucha and kefir. My Goodness operates from the English Market in Cork and offers Click and Collect and home delivery options. Their goal is to become a zero-waste company, offering in-store refills for their probiotic drinks.

How is My Goodness Different?

My Goodness is different due to its commitment to creating alternative, sustainable, and ethical products. According to its founder, Virginia O’Gara, the company challenges the status quo, believing in the possibility of better, healthier, and more sustainable business practices. One key example of their innovation is in the production of kefir and kombucha, described as delicious, probiotic beverages that are not only good for you but also for the environment. These products are alive, constantly fermenting and changing, which adds a unique element of unpredictability, making them both functional and magical ([Taste Cork](#))([Cork City Council](#)

‘Everything that My Goodness does is alternative — we have a genuine belief that it is the right thing to challenge the status quo, and to strive to prove that there is always a better, healthier, ethical and sustainable way to live and be in business. To at least try, that is my mantra’. Virginia O’Gara

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"There's a lot of rain in Ireland, and I began to see rain as a valuable resource. Could we harvest it and turn it into something useful?" This question sparked the creation of kombucha and kefir, using rainwater as the base.

My Goodness, Ireland

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How did the Business Start? Who are the Owners Behind My Goodness?



My Goodness was founded by Virginia O'Gara, who started her journey by studying permaculture in Kinsale, Ireland. Permaculture principles such as Earth Care, People Care, and Fair Shares formed the foundation of My Goodness. Virginia's philosophy revolved around transforming food waste into something nourishing and valuable, driven by her fascination with fermentation.

Virginia and her husband, Dónal, initially did not plan to enter the food industry. However, they began their culinary journey with the grassroots movement "Food Not Bombs," which aimed to feed the most vulnerable by using surplus food. This initiative led to their first venture into the English Market in Cork, where they initially set up a temporary stall before moving to a permanent location.

An essential element of their ethos was innovation and sustainability, as seen in Virginia's inspiration from nature. She saw rain as a valuable resource and used it as a base for creating kombucha and kefir, probiotic drinks made from rainwater, sugar, and kefir grains. These living, fermented beverages help with digestion and boost energy, reflecting My Goodness's commitment to health and sustainability.



The business started as a raw vegan café called Very Healthy Food on Douglas Road, which was Cork's first vegan food business. After the café closed, Virginia and her team opened a raw vegan fermentation business at The Other Place, a former gay disco on North Main Street.

Today, My Goodness has expanded to four locations in Cork's English Market, with 20 employees. The business continues to thrive on its core values of ethical, sustainable, and creative food production.

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"We've invested massively at our factory in Wilton, €250,000 in the last year alone on a new production line. We saw what was coming, and that has given us massive capacity to drive it forward."

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My Goodness, Ireland



How is it a GrassRoots Initiative?

My Goodness stands out as an eco-health business due to its strong commitment to sustainability and health-focused practices. At its core, the company integrates principles from permaculture, aiming for zero waste and closed-loop systems. This agricultural philosophy emphasises the reuse of resources, ensuring that what could be considered waste is repurposed for a secondary use. Virginia O'Gara, the founder, applies these principles not only in food production but also in community projects like the Cork Urban Soil Project (CUSP).

CUSP is a year-long social experiment focused on turning food and compostable packaging waste into soil through anaerobic digestion. This project is designed to change people's attitudes toward waste and demonstrate how communities can manage their waste sustainably, turning would-be waste into valuable resources. By producing nutrient-rich soil, My Goodness is working towards creating a system where food waste directly benefits the local ecosystem.

Additionally, their products, such as kombucha and kefir, not only promote personal wellness through probiotics but are made from rainwater, a sustainable resource. The business also engages in various community-led environmental initiatives, such as using compostable packaging and supporting local farmers, furthering its goal of promoting eco-consciousness and health.

My Goodness encourages other small communities to adopt similar sustainable practices, proving that local, community-driven solutions can make a significant environmental impact. This holistic approach to both personal health and environmental sustainability defines My Goodness as an eco-health business.



What were the Main Challenges and Risks During the Startup-Process, and How were they Overcome?



The startup journey of *My Goodness* was fraught with significant challenges and risks that tested the resilience of the team. Some of the main hurdles they faced include:

Fire and Loss of Kitchen: Six months into their journey, a fire destroyed their kitchen space, a crucial part of their production process. This incident could have easily derailed the business, but instead, they quickly adapted by transforming a friend's kitchen into a workable space. This allowed them to continue operations while searching for a new permanent location.

Robberies: Just a week after the fire, the business experienced a robbery while working at a farmers' market, losing all their cash. These back-to-back financial hits were demoralising, but the team stayed motivated by supporting each other and drawing strength from their community. They pushed forward, driven by their belief in their products and business ethos.

Relocating and Rebuilding: After losing their initial space, the founders secured a new location in Marina Commercial Park in early 2016. This new facility, a 1,000-square-foot production space, allowed them to expand and dedicate half the space to producing rainwater-fermented kefir and kombucha, core products of their business.

"When we reopened the stall in The English Market, there was no one around town. That place has been through a lot, there was a lot of camaraderie and determination to keep the place open and keep the lights on. "Everyone pulled together; the team around us – suppliers, other traders in The English Market – we have a fierce connection of supporting each other. There were some fairly gloomy days for sure, but every day seemed to get a little bit better. We learned a lot from it; we learned a lot from the customers, it was a bit surreal, very intimate." Virginia O Gara.

Rebuilding After Setbacks: Despite enduring multiple robberies and the devastating fire, the team remained focused on rebuilding and finding ways to thrive. Their deep connection with the local community, suppliers, and other traders in The English Market provided the support and camaraderie they needed to stay afloat. With a fierce determination to keep the business going, they gradually recovered and found their niche within Cork's food scene, even in challenging circumstances. Through a combination of resilience, adaptability, and community support, *My Goodness* overcame these significant startup challenges and has since grown into a successful, eco-conscious, raw vegan food business. Their story highlights the importance of perseverance in the face of adversity and how crucial a supportive network can be during tough

"Six months in there was a fire, and we lost our kitchen. The next week we were working at a Farmers' Market, and we had all our money robbed. It was the harshest time for our business, we just managed to motivate each other to keep going. We transformed a friend's kitchen into a workable space and started hunting for our new spot. In early 2016, we leased a premises in Marina Commercial Park. We now have a 1,000-square-foot production space, and half of that is dedicated to creating rainwater-fermented Kefir and Kombucha" Virginia O Gara.

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Co-funded by the European Union

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What Success Factors Helped your Business?



Commitment to Sustainability and Zero Waste: A central tenet of their business is minimising waste and maximising the use of surplus food. By sourcing leftover vegetables from farmers' markets and transforming them into delicious, seasonal ferments, *My Goodness* has turned food waste into a valuable resource. This practice not only supports local farmers but also aligns with their eco-friendly, permaculture-inspired ethos of a closed-loop system.

"I realised that a lot of my friends who were farmers were going home with loads of vegetables that they had spent all season growing. There is only a four-hour window to trade well at a Farmers' Market, and not everyone can make it out, so we thought, wouldn't it be great if we could enjoy the seasonality of what I get to see all the time at the Farmers Markets, and provide that in the city centre? The decision to take the permanent stall in the English Market enabled My Goodness to offer a range of tasty and nourishing foods and fermented drinks to a wider audience — one that might not be able to make it out to a daytime Farmers' Market" Virginia O Gara.

Innovative and Health-Focused Products: Their range of fermented foods and drinks, such as kefir, kombucha, and kimchi, stands out for its health benefits. The probiotics in these products promote digestion, energy, and overall wellness. The unique use of rainwater in their fermentation process also highlights their innovative approach to creating sustainable, health-conscious foods.

Strong Community Engagement: *My Goodness* has built a deep connection with the local Cork community. Their presence at various farmers' markets, including Mahon and Douglas, as well as their permanent stall at The English Market, gives them visibility across the city. They have cultivated relationships with farmers and traders, creating a supportive network that fuels their business and helps them stay true to their sustainable practices.

'Rupert Hugh Jones from Cork Markets has curated an incredible market where he picks people not just for their product, but for their character, and he encourages us to be our best at all times. The people who shop there know that, support that and it brings out the best in them too. It's the perfect test area to launch this social experiment where we give the option to make the right choice, which is: to not create waste. We are asking people for a window of just four hours once a week to have a plastic-free zone.' Virginia O Gara.



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What Success Factors Helped your Business?



Adaptability and Resilience: Despite early setbacks, including a fire and multiple robberies, *My Goodness* has shown remarkable resilience. The founders and their team were able to adapt quickly, relocate, and rebuild their business. This resilience is a testament to their belief in their mission and products.

"The atmosphere in the market is fantastic and everyone is so friendly, so we are delighted to be officially part of something so unique and special." Virginia O Gara.

Holistic Business Ethos: The philosophy behind *My Goodness* is rooted in permaculture principles, emphasising not only sustainability but also ethical business practices. Their goal is to promote a high quality of life through good food, a strong sense of community, and a commitment to the environment. This holistic approach appeals to a growing market of consumers who are more conscious of the impact of their food choices on their health and the planet.

Innovative Social Experiments: Initiatives like the Cork Urban Soil Project (CUSP) show their commitment to environmental responsibility. CUSP aims to turn food and compostable waste into soil through an anaerobic bio-digester, promoting a zero-waste culture and encouraging others to participate in similar projects.

'By staying true to our core values of sustainability, innovation, and community, we have built a unique and successful eco-health business in Cork'. Virginia O Gara.

What Advice Based on Your Experience Would You Share with Other Businesses Embarking on an Eco-health Sustainability Journey?

Start Small and Test the Market: *My Goodness* benefitted from their experience in the Start-Up Stall at The English Market, which gave them the chance to experiment with their products and gauge customer feedback before committing to a long-term presence. This allowed them to grow more confidently, knowing there was demand for their offerings. Other businesses could benefit from similar opportunities, testing their products and concepts in temporary, low-risk settings before expanding.

Embrace Resilience and Adaptability: Challenges like fires and robberies could have halted *My Goodness*, but their determination to adapt and rebuild helped them grow stronger. Setbacks are inevitable in any venture, especially in sustainability-focused businesses where new methods and systems are often involved. The key is to remain flexible and innovative, finding creative solutions to challenges as they arise.

Foster a Strong Community Connection: *My Goodness* thrived due to the strong relationships they built with local farmers, suppliers, and customers. In the eco-health space, creating a sense of community is critical. It helps build trust, loyalty, and support for your products and mission. Collaborate with local suppliers and actively engage with the community to ensure you are addressing their needs while aligning with sustainability goals.

Promote Sustainability Holistically: For *My Goodness*, sustainability was more than just a buzzword—it was a core philosophy rooted in permaculture. This holistic approach informed everything they did, from sourcing surplus produce to creating zero-waste solutions with initiatives like the Cork Urban Soil Project. Businesses should integrate sustainability into all aspects of their operations, creating systems that minimize waste and promote environmental stewardship.

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A Lifetime Experience

My Goodness is — a by-product of a lifetime's experience, learning, and a commitment to building a community around their food ethos.

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Stay True to Your Values: Even as they expanded, My Goodness held firmly to their ethical and sustainable values, focusing on offering products they believed in and that aligned with their mission. This authenticity resonated with customers. Other businesses should similarly prioritise their core values over short-term gains, as authenticity builds long-term customer loyalty.

Collaborate and Learn from Feedback: The feedback My Goodness received during their Start-Up Stall experience helped them refine their offerings and expand successfully. Being open to feedback from customers and partners can provide critical insights into what works, what doesn't, and how to grow sustainably.

Ultimately, starting small, staying adaptable, engaging the community, and holding firm to sustainable values are key factors for any business looking to thrive in the eco-health space.



- [My Goodness - Winners of Cork Food Policy Council's Annual Awards scheme designed to recognise those excelling in sustainable food practices in Cork.](#)
- [Cork's English Market traders: People's kindness got us through this past year](#)
- [My Goodness - takes up a permanent home in the English Market](#)
- [My Goodness! What a business plan](#)
- [My Goodness... it's a whole new adventure for Cork raw-vegan food company](#)

Contact information

