

Real Foods expands Kauai, launches Free Bird and acquires Uber Nutrition

The Covid-19 pandemic has put even the most successful businesses in the restaurant sector to the test, but Real Foods Group has used this time to diversify its business and position it for growth post-Covid.



Dean Kowarski, CEO of Real Foods Group

The company – which lists Kauai, Nü Health Food Café, Highveld Honey and other food brands in its portfolio – is growing its footprint abroad and has launched two new brands and acquired a food manufacturing business.

Kauai's international expansion

Dean Kowarski, CEO of Real Foods announced that, “Despite the international lockdown, Kauai is expanding further into Europe under a master territory franchise agreement with Wellness Brands Europe Ltd, and plans to open 20 Kauai fast-casual restaurants over the next three years in the UK. The first restaurant will open next month in Edinburgh with a second soon to follow.”

Says Richard Lowe, operational director, Wellness Brands Europe: “While this is an interesting time to be launching a new restaurant brand in the UK, we believe in the growth potential of healthy food, and are investing ahead of the gradual re-opening of the restaurant industry. We also understand the importance of healthy eating in boosting immune systems.”

The Kauai Thailand business opened its second location during lockdown, a dark kitchen focused on deliveries. Its first store, inside a Virgin Active health club, has reopened and both locations are growing week on week, according to a statement by Real Foods Group. New retail locations in Bangkok are also being sought for further expansion. Kauai's first European store in the Netherlands (inside Utrecht Centraal Station) has also reopened.

New free-range chicken restaurant brand

At the end of May, Real Foods launched Free Bird, a free-range crispy chicken burger concept. Free Bird is initially trading as a virtual brand in dark kitchens around Cape Town, Sandton and Pretoria available via UberEats and Mr D with plans for physical retail locations over the coming months.



"We saw the gap for a differentiated, premium, free-range crispy chicken burger and strips concept earlier in the year, but accelerated our launch plans during lockdown and switched to dark kitchens. It's a high-quality menu, made with clean, wholesome ingredients that are locally sourced with full traceability.

"The free-range chicken comes from the Hemel en Aarde Valley near Hermanus, the fries are hand-cut daily, hand-made buns are from Schoon bakery in Stellenbosch, and condiments like pickled vegetables and authentic kimchi are made in-house using simple, fresh ingredients. It's re-imagining comfort food for a modern era," explains Says Kowarski.

Healthy at home with Kauai Real Foods Market

During the initial Level 5 lockdown, Real Foods saw the need to help customers remain healthy at home by offering convenient and healthy ready-to-eat meals and giving customers access to a healthy pantry online. The team created the concept of Kauai Real Foods Market, offering its healthy and convenient snack range, [Pick n Pay frozen meal range](#) and other pantry staples available via UberEats and Mr D.

When stores reopened with contactless pick-up and payment via the Kauai app for deliveries and takeaways, Kauai Real Foods Market expanded to additional Kauai stores, and further product development is underway.



Kauai diversifies with PnP frozen foods range

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Acquisition of Uber Nutrition

A new addition to the Real Foods stable is Uber Nutrition, a private label snack bar development and manufacturing company.

"Uber Nutrition produces bars for several leading SA brands, and is known for its highly innovative and healthy approach to 'on the go' food bar development. The acquisition complements Real Foods' philosophy of providing clean, healthy food on the go, and also deepens opportunities for the group in the attractive, fast-growing, ready-to-eat snack category," says Real Foods.

Schoon bakery business evolves

During lockdown, Real Foods' bakery business, Schoon, was able to quickly pivot its business model to offer home delivery of its freshly baked breads and pastries. As lockdown restrictions begin to ease, Schoon has resumed take-away orders,

bread and pastry sales through its cafes, and is working with Checkers to resume the roll-out of its bread and pastries in stores.

Schoon also embarked on a new partnership with UCook in its weekly market boxes and recipe boxes.



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Looking ahead

Kowarski says he takes a practical and positive approach to the challenges that Covid-19 has posed to the restaurant industry.

"We are especially aware of the impact that healthy eating can have on helping to keep communities healthy, and will continue in our mission of making it as easy, accessible and convenient as possible. The safety of our customers and staff also remains a key priority, so we have put in place social distancing and even more stringent hygiene measures at our stores across the globe. We are also adding new measures to make our stores as safe and welcoming as possible for the re-opening of sit-down restaurants this week."

"It's been a challenging few months, but we have reacted quickly and in step with government's guidelines, to find new routes to market to serve our customers, and have launched exciting new products and brands that have been well received. The various teams have also continued to work throughout lockdown on building a pipeline of projects that will be rolling out in the second half of the year," he concludes.

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