



Farmers get together to make futures blossom

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Who's the North-East's Top 200 companies?

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UK Business and Financial Newspaper of the Year

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VINES TARGET: Fiona Wilson and Mike Amann, who run champagne import business Lovely Bubbly. A flotation should give them the financial muscle to buy vines in France.

Listing set to uncork cash for Lovely Bubbly

CHAMPAGNE import business Lovely Bubbly is poised to become the second North-East company ever to list on junior stock market Ofex.

Lovely Bubbly, which was launched by the daughter of former Newcastle Breweries boss Alistair Wilson, Fiona, and her partner Mike Amann in January, is due to make an appearance on Ofex next week.

The Newcastle company, which is backed by Roy Stanley, chief executive of County Durham's Tanfield Group, says it is going public in a bid to fulfil its future plans of buying vines in France to make its own-brand champagne.

The business, which only sources bubbly from small, family-run producers in the Champagne region of North-East France, also plans to take its business Stateside after enlisting the help of "network partners" across the US.

Director Mike Amann said: "Because of

EXCLUSIVE
By Rebekah Ashby

our future plans we have decided we want to publicly list the company and it has taken us six months of hard work to get to this point.

"Floating will give us the ability to raise money in the future for the acquisition of vines in France.

"We are going for Ofex purely and simply because we didn't meet all of the criteria for AIM (Alternative Investment Market), mainly because we are so young, but with Ofex we could get where we wanted to be more quickly.

"We won't be trading the shares until we are ready to buy the vines but it's a case of putting things in place to meet our future plans."

Lovely Bubbly, which ironically began

its business with a deal to sell Champagne to the French Consul, is launching quarter bottles of champagne at Newcastle's biggest racing meeting Northumberland Plate next week. It is also in talks with The Alnwick Garden about supplying its new restaurant.

Mr Amann said: "We launched a network partnership scheme which is a bit like franchising but our partners don't have to buy the business.

"They sign a legal agreement to represent us and sell our champagne and we tested the format here in the North-East and now have partners that cover London, the South East, Jersey and Manchester.

"We are also migrating the business to the US and have network partners lined up in Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, Miami, Dallas and San Francisco."

The company, which has several exclusive supply deals with producers in the

Champagne region of France, around Reims, has some wholesale arrangements, specialises in supplying the corporate market and has upped its first year sales forecast from 20,000 to 24,000 bottles.

Its clients include Newcastle's The Centurion and The Vineyard, The Victoria at Bamburgh, Northumberland, Newcastle Racecourse, events companies and Price-waterhouseCoopers.

Since its launch in 1995, Ofex has served around 500 companies, representing more than 25 industry sectors, and has not only provided a market for shares but also an opportunity to raise equity-based finance.

The only other North-East company to list on Ofex was Newcastle-based hi-tech surveillance company Applied Technology Monitoring which floated in 2001.