

# Violet Crumble to crunch US market



Phil Sims, Robern Menz CEO, with Violet Crumble bars.

VALERINA CHANGARATHIL

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FOR more than 170 years, Adelaide business Robern Menz has maintained that sweet treats are serious business.

Now a ten-fold growth in sales of Violet Crumble chocolate bars in the US has raised expectations to such highs that the company has set up its first overseas arm to drive growth.

Fourth-generation family-owned Robern Menz, which also makes the popular Menz FruChocs, bought the Violet Crumble brand from Nestlé in 2018.

At the time, the much-celebrated deal also won funding from the state government to support a \$4m expansion of the company's Glynde facility.

"When we bought the brand, it had been traded overseas through the grey market, being sold by importers who had bought the product in Australia," Robern Menz chief executive Phil Sims said.

"We had no oversight of shipments, stock control or brand management."

As a result, an importer was appointed and the bars repackaged for US customers.

"The response in the market was so amazing that we set up our own business in the US at the end of 2020, which allows us to get closer to customers," Mr Sims said.

"We are also now warehousing our stock in Los Angeles and New Jersey."

The overseas incorporation of the business had been a significant investment but the group "will well and truly break even" in the first quarter.

"The number of bars shipped into the US has tripled to a million bars this year," he said.

"We started off with exporting two container loads of the bars in September 2018, and now we are up to 20 containers, a ten-fold increase."

Robern Menz is expecting significant growth in the US market and also has plans to increase its presence in the Canadian market.

"We are only scratching the surface in terms of population reach in the US," he said.

Robern Menz has strong relationships with Florida-based regional supermarket chain Publix, which has a network of 1200 stores, and the 280-store national retail chain Cost Plus World Market.

Robern Menz has a workforce of 130 in South Australia. Ten of these employees

work night shifts through the week to service the US market demand.

About 15 per cent of the Violet Crumble chocolates made in SA are exported to US.

Robern Menz, which traces its roots to 1850, has an annual turnover of more than \$30m. The group makes more than 100 products, including the well-known Crown Mints and JeliChocs brands.