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Thrings meets... Dylan Watkins, Chief Woof at Poppy's Picnic

Dylan Watkins, owner of Wiltshire dog food brand Poppy's Picnic and voted Start-up Business of the Year at the 2018 Wiltshire Business Awards, talks fresh diets and delegating with Thrings partner and awards judge, Ramona Derbyshire.

What's your business all about?

Poppy's Picnic is helping change attitudes - one bowl at a time. We help people feed their dogs a fresher and more nutritionally balanced diet. Right now more than 50% of dogs are obese or have diabetes, so moving away from a highly processed diet is important. As humans we are encouraged to eat five fresh things a day to live better and we are simply applying this to our pets too.

Has Poppy's Picnic always been in Wiltshire?

We're celebrating our second birthday this October and we've been in Wiltshire from the start. Our newly-built custom plant near Melksham should be up and running in the next few months.

What's the best thing about the job?

It has to be the messages I get from relieved, grateful dog owners, which are heart-warming. Some people have been close to putting their dogs down, having tried everything to help them. Seeing photos of their dogs running around with their skin and other illnesses all cleared up is so rewarding - it shows us our product is really doing some good.

What sets Poppy's Picnic apart?

Other than offering a fresher option for dogs, the fact that our food is handmade in Wiltshire has definitely

helped us stand out in the pet food market... and even get into Hong Kong. Wiltshire's farming produce is synonymous with quality and so we're proud to shout about using seasonal vegetables and meat from local sources.

What has been your biggest challenge?

When you've set a business up from scratch, it can be hard to let things go. I'm on a mentor programme with NatWest where I'm learning to zoom in and out and let my capable staff do their thing. I've also had to accept my limitations! I might be a great marketer, but when it comes to things like accountancy and the law, it's important to buy in the skillset.

What did the Wiltshire Business Awards do for you?

These were the first awards we ever entered. We didn't have particularly high hopes, but when the email came through inviting us to be interviewed, I thought "this is really exciting". It was a good time for us to be recognised as it helped us attract extra investment as well as win new customers. Now we are pushing awards like mad!

What's the future for Poppy's Picnic?

We're launching loads of new products, including cat food next year. And yes, that means we're on the lookout for suitable feline models to join Poppy, my dog and star of the show, as the joint faces of the business. We've also just taken on a world-renowned nutritionist and she's brilliant. Her focus is to create an alternative for those dog owners who are not quite ready to make the jump to a fully fresh doggy diet.

For more information about Thrings,

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