



## CASE STUDY

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Practical help for businesses  
**Recorked UK**



**European Union**  
European Regional  
Development Fund

# CONSUMPTION OF SPARKLING WINE AND CHAMPAGNE IS RAPIDLY ON THE RISE IN THE UK

In the past five years, sparkling wine sales have increased by 76%\*, and this country is now the largest market for champagne outside of France\*\*.



1.62m hectolitres of sparkling wine was consumed in the UK in 2016/17\*. That is the equivalent of 162 Olympic-size swimming pools of sparkling wine.

For every bottle popped there is a cork stopper, which up until recently in the UK had no immediate use other than to go into the waste bin.





# CORK RECYCLING SCHEME

## First for the UK

Innovative entrepreneur, Sanjay Aggarwal recognised such redundant material could potentially open up fresh possibilities for his business, and at the same time help the environment and the local community.



## Background

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Sanjay's existing company Spice Kitchen is a family run artisan producer of spice tin gift sets, along with handmade spice blends, loose teas and cookware, with the majority of his trade conducted online and also via stockists in the UK. It was through his company becoming a 'business success' case study for eBay, and attending one of its international summits that he met a Portuguese contact involved in the natural cork industry, derived from the bark of oak trees. It was from then that he formed the idea to introduce the UK's first ever cork recycling scheme, and he went on to set-up a social enterprise known as Recorked UK.



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Sanjay Aggarwal, pioneer of the UK's first natural cork recycling scheme.



# CORK RECYCLING STATION

[WWW.RECORKEDUK.ORG](http://WWW.RECORKEDUK.ORG)



@RECORKEDUK



**Recorked's recycling scheme  
is available throughout the UK.**

To find out more, or to join  
the growing network visit:

[www.recorkeduk.org](http://www.recorkeduk.org)

Through this initiative Sanjay supplies recycling stations and recycling sacks free-of-charge to many organisations around the UK, such as pubs, restaurants, wine merchants and vineyards, including The Ritz, Chester Racecourse, and the River Cottage restaurants to name a few.

Once each collection partner has filled their sack, Sanjay will then arrange collection for delivery to his company base, where he then sorts the corks ready for resale online, for purposes such as craft projects, fishing, cork boards and weddings.

Recorked UK offers a number of benefits to the community, both locally and further afield. For every cork collected he donates a percentage to charity. If preferred, the organisation that collects the corks can nominate their own chosen charity, or alternatively Recorked UK will donate to FRANK Water which provides safe drinking water and sanitation to over 100 communities in India and Nepal.

Not only that, but the enterprise supports young people with employment and employability skills.

# Support from EBRI

## New product feasibility. Walsall, West Midlands

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Sanjay first connected with the European Bioenergy Research Institute (EBRI), Aston University when he attended one of its 'Value from Waste' Master Classes in Stoke-on-Trent in the West Midlands.

During the two-day course he discovered how new market opportunities can be developed from unwanted material such as food waste, cardboard boxes, plastic waste, textile residues, sawdust, waste oils, manure, hay straw, sugar beet residue, and brewers' spent grain waste.

These EBRI Master Classes are part of an EU European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) initiative which provides practical help to small and medium sized enterprises in the West Midlands to develop new products and services.

### Help to identify new market opportunities

Following on from the Master Class event, EBRI provided Sanjay with detailed documented guidance as to whether natural waste cork material could be used for other purposes, for instance in an 'energy-from-waste' process.

In the UK, it is estimated that 216 million bottles of sparkling wine are opened every year generating a massive abundance of unwanted corks. In order to help identify new ways of reusing these redundant bottle stoppers, EBRI's specialist team of business research associates analysed the chemical and physical properties of natural cork to identify the most feasible opportunities. As part of this investigation, they looked at the various processes and treatments which could be applied, to see which would be the most efficient process to recover energy from corks.

### Findings and recommendations

Included in EBRI's report for Recorked UK were recommendations on alternative uses of cork material, and how it could be used in new market sectors such as the pharmaceutical industry. Cork contains a number of useful properties which could offer health benefits. For instance, it contains sterols, which may help reduce cholesterol, as well as flavonoids which have potential anti-oxidant benefits that could be of interest to the food, cosmetic, plastics and pharmacological industry.

It also offers a wide range of innovative opportunities in the development of new sustainable products, such as thermal insulation, flooring tiles, soil conditioner, ecoceramics, cement applications and composting.

### Outcome

EBRI's findings and recommendations enabled Sanjay to consider various new opportunities for his business, both in the energy-from-waste arena, as well as for the development of a wide range of new products. He has subsequently shared these ideas with the UK Cork Industry Federation of which he is a member.

The evaluation provided by EBRI has widened the horizon for Recorked to form very beneficial collaborations with established businesses and associations which could become future partners, suppliers or customers of his business.

\* UHY Hacker Young

\*\* Wine and Spirit Trade Association (WSTA) – 2017

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EBRI has inspired me to consider the various different uses of natural cork stoppers, some of which I had never contemplated before such as energy and bio-products.

As a member of the UK Cork Industry Federation, this knowledge can help not only my business but the industry as a whole”.

**Sanjay Aggarwal**  
**Founder of Recorked UK**

(Photo below) Sanjay Aggarwal of Recorked UK (pictured far left) at EBRI's 'Value from Waste' Master Class which was held at the Centre of Refurbishment Excellence (CoRE) in Stoke-on-Trent



The European Bioenergy Research Institute (EBRI) at Aston University provides practical solutions for businesses to explore the growing 'Energy-from-Waste' market, and the opportunities it offers. Companies can benefit from specialist support, cutting-edge technologies and bespoke events, e.g. workshops to help stimulate business start-up and growth, plus the development of new products and services.

**To discover more email:**

**bioenergy@aston.ac.uk**  
or call 0121 204 3383

**[www.bioenergy-for-business.org](http://www.bioenergy-for-business.org)**



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