

From relatively small beginnings in 1969 when the company established a citric acid manufacturing plant in Ringaskiddy, Pfizer has grown to employ more than 4,000 people across five facilities in Cork, Kildare and Dublin.

Pfizer Case Study

Total capital investment by the company in Ireland now totals over \$8 billion following the latest announcements of a €300 million investment programme in the continuing development of the manufacturing sites in Grange Castle, Newbridge and Ringaskiddy and a further \$40 million to support the production of the mRNA drug substance for the Covid-19 vaccine at the Grange Castle facility.

“The original citric acid facility was a pretty reasonable investment for the time at \$200 million,” notes Paul Duffy VP, Small Molecule Operations. “It started with just 16 people and our Irish operations have grown from there. Every decade has seen further significant investments in manufacturing at Ringaskiddy. We added a second, third, and then a fourth building and now have more than 600 full time staff on the site.”



Part of the latest investment includes the construction of a development facility on the existing Ringaskiddy site to manufacture pharmaceutical compounds for Pfizer's clinical trials globally. "This is a very important development as it expands Pfizer's role in Ireland from the manufacture of already approved medicines into supporting the earlier phases of new medicine development."

"Citric acid manufacturing was not high-end technology, yet we have managed to get from there to today's innovative manufacturing activities, development and advanced R&D" says Duffy. "The trust that the company has in Ireland as a location, its people and their capability is at the heart of it. Ireland has proven to be a reliable location which delivers on investment."

Ireland is now a significant manufacturing base for Pfizer globally with many of the company's leading and newest medicines produced in this country. Manufacturing activity spans active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), solid dose pharmaceuticals, sterile injectables, vaccines and biopharmaceuticals. The Irish sites manufacture medicines and vaccines in the areas of arthritis, inflammation, cancer, anti-infectives, haemophilia, pain and stroke among others.

In addition, a significant element of Pfizer's Worldwide Research & Development (WR&D) is based in Ireland. The Global Biotherapeutics Technology group was established in 2006 at Grange Castle and is part of a world-leading protein drug discovery unit within Pfizer Worldwide R&D.

The pandemic has proved to be a learning experience for the company. "It has been very interesting for us overall, however, the biggest learning has been the vaccine story," says Duffy. "The ability to move from vaccine discovery to manufacturing and on to supplying doses at such pace has been extraordinary. Our recognition that good science demands rigor, our commitment to patient safety, and our close partnership with regulators that are equally committed to scientific integrity was hugely pivotal in achieving success with our vaccine. What we learned was that there is a huge amount to be gained from our decision to undertake several processes in parallel that traditionally have occurred sequentially."

2006

The Global Biotherapeutics Technology group was established in 2006



Indeed, the only real risk involved was financial. “Pharmaceutical companies traditionally wait for approval before investing in manufacturing,” Duffy explains. “In the case of the Covid vaccine Pfizer invested \$2 billion in manufacturing before it was proven to be effective and approved. That was a very big bet, but we would not have been able to supply the vaccines so quickly without making it.”

Moving away from the sequential model also saw the company bringing suppliers and other partners into the process before they would normally have been needed. “We are now seeing new ways of doing things and how to get to the end of the process quicker.”

The change to the working models will also have a lasting impact. “Many of our people have not been in the office for 18 months and they have faced challenges including the isolation that you can feel in the absence of personal interaction. We do a lot of work to support our people’s wellbeing and psychological health. Things have now evolved

and developed to a point that we might never go back fully to the way we were. We might want a blend of the different ways of working.”

He also pays tribute to the colleagues who went to work every day in manufacturing and other essential operations. “Our people appreciate that they are making life saving medications and we are thankful to the colleagues who went to work every day when others might have been too frightened to leave their homes.”

He is very positive about the future of Pfizer both globally and in Ireland. “Our pipeline is vast, and I am very optimistic about our ability to move new medicines through the pipeline safely, reliably, and successfully. It is hugely significant that the production of the mRNA drug substance for the Covid-19 vaccine will be done at our Grange Castle facility. It is really exciting to think about the role that mRNA can play in future medicines.”

But there are challenges as well. “The Global environment is constantly evolving and there will be challenges in ensuring sustainable supplies of energy and water. From an Irish perspective general costs of living and operating expenses need to compare well in a global environment when companies and people are considering locating here. As a nation we must ensure that our overall cost base does not go out of kilter with competitor locations.”

That said, he remains confident in Ireland’s ability to compete. “We need to continue to focus on the things that made us successful to date and sustain the whole ecosystem of what makes Ireland a good place to do business. I am very optimistic about the future of pharma in Ireland and the future of Pfizer. We continue to be supported by Pfizer globally as evidenced by the latest €300 million investment. It is important for us to deliver on that, and I am confident that we will. We have done it for the past 50 years and we will continue to do so.”



€300M

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