

The return of taste

A BAKERS' ORGANIZATION, ESTABLISHED IN THE GERMAN-SPEAKING PART OF EUROPE, FOCUSES ON THE SLOW DEVELOPMENT OF TASTE AND QUALITY IN BAKED GOODS



At the beginning of the new millennium, a group of German-speaking bakers developed the idea of not only producing bread of good quality but also propagating it. Based on the findings that the development of bread taste and nutritional quality is not only a matter of raw materials but is also linked to certain production processes, they founded a circle of quality bakers in 2003 and called it "Slow Baking" with reference to the slow food movement. As happens often with non-profit organizations, wheeler-dealers identified the potential gold mine and tried to use the name, the members and the association for their own benefits.

The fight for their own identity was time-consuming and expensive. Following several changes of ownership, the Slow Baking brand is now the property of Ireks, a bakery improver producer from Kulmbach, Germany. A magazine with the same name is published through a publishing company that is at enmity with the association. Therefore, the association has given itself the name "SlowBaking Association – baking with time for taste".

Nevertheless, the association is pleased that it fought for its independence. The membership list includes 390 bakeries with sales outlets that range from only one to more than 40 and amongst them are such renowned German names as Fidelisbeck (Wangen), Fritz Mühlenbäckerei (Munich), von der Heide (Willingen), Königsbeck (Stuttgart). There is also

Jean Kircher from the bakery Pains et Tradition from Mont Saint-Martin in Lorraine, France, which is also a supplier of frozen baked goods.

SlowBaking is not a backward-looking traditionalistic association but rather a group which – similar to the slow food movement – re-introduces quality relevant virtues into today's production processes and is ready to develop new ones without compromising practicability.

Therefore, the association's catalogue of basic rules is considered to be a guideline for the manufacturing practice of premium products; they not only provide clarity and orientation but also leave room for further development.

A bakery complying with the guideline can apply for the certification of their products (first stage) and the entire bakery (second stage). With the certification, the products or the company are entitled to use the SlowBaking logo which is a snail carrying a baking oven on its back. An independent certification body, the Institute for Cereal Processing (IGV) in Potsdam-Rehbrügge, Germany, audits the production methods, recipes and quality of the baked goods according to the SlowBaking guidelines. After the quality audit has been passed, a baker is allowed to label his products with the SlowBaking logo. The first products were certified in autumn 2005. Up until now, about 10% of members have concluded the certification process for their entire business



SlowBaking

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Slow Milling



Slow Milling®
Wo Geschmack zu Hause ist

The concept of Slow Baking is not only finding its supporters in the bakeries but also amongst the ingredient suppliers. Kampffmeyer Food Innovation (KFI) is a company from Hamburg, Germany, that has been supporting the SlowBaking Association for quite some time by providing training possibilities and technical advice for cereals and grains. Analogously to SlowBaking, KFI has now introduced the trademark "Slow Milling – Natural Ingredients for Slow Bakers". The logo displays the connection: a snail carrying a millwheel on its back. This label is used for ingredients for slow bakers, amongst them high protein flours, malted rye flakes and a bakery enzyme - all approved according to the basic slow baking principles of the SlowBaking Association – baking with time for taste. This product range is supplemented by a broad range of recipes and advice for solving bakery problems. +++

and are now allowed to promote their products accordingly. As a result of the public relations work of the bakeries and the association, the logo is gaining attention in German-speaking European countries. The logo is present in the press and the public associates it with quality and baking culture. The members meet officially as well as informally to exchange experiences. In their opinion, the risk arising from competition amongst them is much lower than the advantages gained by the exchange of ideas and cooperation. Technical seminars are frequently conducted at the Institute for Cereal Processing; in 2010 there will also be seminars and workshops in the new test bakery of Kampffmeyer Mühlen in Hamburg. Currently a collaboration with the globally represented Rlichemont Club is being negotiated. From autumn 2009, the association published its own magazine addressing the final consumers. The journal, which is published with an individualized envelope for each bakery, provides information on baked goods, their quality and their production, on nutrition and health and also promotes the work of slow bakers in an entertaining setting. +++

Interview with Jean Kircher

Vice-Chairman of the SlowBaking Association – baking with time for taste

+ **bbi:** Mr. Kircher, let's start with clarifying one inconsistency. The principles of the SlowBaking Association do not allow for the use of frozen products and yet you are a producer of frozen baked goods. How does this work?

+ **Kircher:** Cold temperatures do not kill quality! The ingredients and the method are decisive! We strictly keep to the traditional rules; optimal dough ripening, gentle mixing and kneading as in former times; direct dough preparation at 24 °C without interruption or retardation; artisan dough make-up every time as a machine will weaken the dough pieces or reduce their volume. And all this without any chemistry, emulsifiers, added gluten or added enzymes. We have not invented anything new but we just stick to the traditional rules as much as possible without speed mixers, bakery improvers or proofing retarders. The human being and in this context the baker is the central element for quality. He is the one that decides the method and not the machines. The only compromise that we allow is the freezing of semi-baked or par-baked products. Nothing

will be harmed or deteriorated in terms of taste, aroma or eating pleasure.

I feel comfortable about the principles of slow baking because we are not talking about the same world of frozen products. Slow baking is not the inedible, chemically pumped up roll or baguette produced on express lines with the only goal of being a standardized product.

Slow bakers do not want to produce and market such standardized products that share the same description as baked goods.

+ **bbi:** The Slow Baking movement started in the German-speaking regions. How much has it spread over Europe and beyond now?

+ **Kircher:** We are still at the infancy stage but the idea of Slow Baking is gaining impetus. Everywhere in Europe and throughout the world more and more people are recognizing that we are driving our food into the ground: in the long run dead food will kill the people it should nourish. The ►

SlowBaking – the bakery trade's quality attack encompasses

- + the renaissance of traditional baking cultures based on the principles of own production
- + the use of scientific and practical know-how for the improvement of the production processes and for the implementation of findings from nutritional research
- + the strict non-use of industrial pre-mixes and frozen products
- + the careful selection of natural raw materials and the exclusive use of high quality ingredients
- + long maturing times for dough - similar to the ripening of wine and cheese - for complete development of aromatic taste and improved digestibility
- + production based on its own high quality recipes and sophisticated baking processes +++

spiral of “more, more, more” has resulted in a nutritional insanity: everything is pasteurized, sterilized, microbiologically verified and most of all standardized. On the national markets there are only a handful of purchasers now; they do not even know, test or enjoy the products but rather only look for price, packaging, ISO, BRC or IFS certificates.

The result of this blindness is a disease because man should eat living products and not dead ones. Minerals, vitamins and proteins are digestible and can be used by the body only when they are living, active and healthy. Everything else results in anemia, diabetes, allergies, sclerosis or cancer. This

I am honestly convinced that industrially produced food is not good food and that the food retailers have understood that. So the retail is looking for alternatives.

is also true for bread: the consumer is in the state of recognizing that healthy bread is healthy food.

+ bbi: How many certification bodies are there today? Do you plan on extending this network and if yes how far can this be done without reducing the convergence?

+ Kircher: The only certification body currently is the IGV. We are in discussions with Swiss and French institutes. We live in a world where approximately 20% of people are conscious of their food. Maybe this is our limit! 20% of the bakers!

The problem is actually a matter of willingness and capability. For the majority of bakers it will be difficult to change back to artisan production so that means we will be just a few for quite a long time to come. But maybe it is good the way it is ...

Most important is that the identity of Slow Baking remains trustworthy and honest with the result that the right price is achieved for the right product. It is a fact that industrialization has adulterated the rules of nutrition and that artisan quality is not always rewarded.

+ bbi: How can a baker become a member of the SlowBaking Association? Who has to be contacted if the baker does not speak German and what requirements need to be fulfilled?

+ Kircher: Basically it is a philosophical position towards quality and the passion to be a baker. Even if a baker is not a superstar but is willing to improve, there are many possibilities amongst the slow bakers for him.

A baker from Hungary for example, is just doing an internship in my company. Currently, I am the contact for bakers from non-German speaking countries.

+ bbi: We know the principles of Slow Baking and the concept. Can you explain in a few words the essentials of the Slow Baking movement – is it an artisan tradition, healthy eating, a marketing idea or something quite different?

+ Kircher: It is a bit of everything. We live in a society where everything counts: pleasure, health, marketing, simplification of the production process and price. Our idea can only be successful if we keep our promises. So the main focus is genuine quality and the know-how to achieve this. An example is to produce a roll that tastes good and is also a healthy food.

In plain English: a modern roll made from dough that has 55% hydration within 45 minutes on an automatic line and is then baked in a circulation oven has nothing to do with tradition. It contains “fast sugars” which – similar to buns and toast bread – speed up the metabolism and directly contribute to weight gains.

The reasons:

- 1) With a hydration of 55%, dough is not done. More water would have resulted in more taste, improved freshness and better digestibility.
- 2) During the short proofing time, the sugars cannot be split up into CO₂, alcohol and flavor components. The addition of high amounts of emulsifiers and yeast will yield a perfect looking roll, but the proofing time is too short in order to degrade the “bad” sugars which then remain in the product.
- 3) A circulation oven is very practical and productive but it lacks the bottom heat which via thermal explosion results in a crumb with large pores, thick crust, aroma and taste.

+ bbi: When reviewing the principles of Slow Baking, it is obvious that there are no strict rules which is contrary to organic organizations such as Demeter for example. It is always stated what one should do but if this is not possible, then everything else is also allowed. Is this degree of freedom good for the trustworthiness of the organization?

+ Kircher: Baking with time for taste is not easy. During my former activities, more than 1,000 bakers came to learn the French tradition of making white bread. All of them have



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seen it and understood the process, but only a few of them have implemented it as well. This is why I turned to slow baking. This is why we are more tolerant and patient; we will give everybody the chance to improve and to become perfect.

+ bbi: Today, who is interested in slow baking – the final consumer, the food catering sectors, restaurants or others?

+ Kircher: The consumer is enthusiastic but immediately runs away when the quality promises are not kept. The caterers still prefer to buy by price because bread is not part of the menu. Canteens and cafeterias are starting to experience political pressure as slowly but surely it is being recognized that cheap food is associated with bad health. The situation in homes for the elderly and in hospitals is very sad as they are headed by purchasing technocrats.

+ bbi: Despite the economic crisis, the out-of-home consumption is one of the large growth markets in Europe and with it the market for frozen baked goods. Do you feel that this is the time for craft bakers to regain market shares via concepts such as slow baking?

+ Kircher: Once again, frozen products can be good. It is the task of the quality bakeries to recover the market shares.

+ bbi: Within food retailers, there are subtle trends towards artisan quality but these are paired with quantities that request industrial production. Slow Baking strictly excludes industrial bakeries. Why is that so and don't you think this may be counterproductive?

+ Kircher: I am honestly convinced that industrially produced food is not good food and that the food retailers have understood that. So the retail is looking for alternatives. In my opinion, this is a fantastic chance for the quality bakers to balance the scales again. This can be done via smaller, local, regional structures, fresh and/or frozen products. The food retailers have to adapt accordingly and question the central organization.

+ bbi: The food retail trade increasingly assumes the role of a bread supplier for the household with the specialist shop and the artisan bakery being pushed aside. Do you think that there is a chance that the artisan or semi-industrial bakeries which follow the slow baking concept will have a future as regional suppliers?

+ Kircher: Currently, the food retailers provide 80-95% of the entire food supply in our societies. Today's bakeries will shrink even more and turn into a service station in rural areas or into superstar bakers in the city. There is nothing left except to find a way together with the food retailers. Approximately 30 industrial bakers in Europe have understood this and they now control 90% of the market share in food retail. New suppliers, that are quality bakers and thus slow bakers, have very new and fantastic opportunities for the future.

+ bbi: What is the relationship between Slow Food and Slow Baking? Slow Food has now installed academic training in Parma. Will you join in?

+ Kircher: We feel comfortable with Slow Food in thought and in philosophy. We also define bread according to the rule: good, clean and fair. But it would be wrong to pose as a guru. We are all fighting for the same idea for better food. All initiatives aimed an improved quality in baked goods are always welcome. The task is so immense.

+ bbi: Mr. Kircher, thank you for the interview. +++



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