

Swedish bridge head

ABOUT ONE YEAR AGO, THE SWEDISH LANTMÄNNEN GROUP IN ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA, TOOK OVER EUROBAKE, A FROZEN BAKED GOODS PRODUCER WITH GERMAN ROOTS



++ figure 1

++ figure 1
Mike Gerhard, Director of Operations at Lantmännen Unibake USA Inc. in St. Petersburg, Florida



++ figure 2

++ figure 2
Two fully automatic lines make up the main equipment for the production: a fully automatic Mecatherm line produces baguettes and baguette rolls while a combination of Rheon dough make-up and Mecatherm vertical oven, cooler and freezer are used for making ciabatta and ciabatta rolls

++ figure 3
A must have in any American production facility are screening machines upstream of the flour metering unit. The Hydra mixers by Sancassiano supply the dough for the fully automatic baguette lines; the other lines are equipped with spiral mixers

++ figure 4
The semi-industrial line at Lantmännen is used for bread and every other product with a production time of less than 8 hours according to the production order

+ The Swedish Lantmännen Group with its production facilities in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, UK, France, Poland and Russia is one of the largest international producers of frozen baked goods for the retail trade and the food service arena. The Group intends to further expand its position on the market. It used to be represented in the US with only one import company. Last year, it acquired Eurobake, a manufacturer of frozen bread and rolls with growth potential in Florida. An expansion of the capacity is already scheduled.

Hartmut Gerhard founded Eurobake in 1993. The company started out as an import business to supply the American market with frozen European baked goods. Around the time of the millennium, the sales volume had grown so much that Gerhard, together with the owners of the main supplier Fricopan from Germany, invested in the first production line in St. Petersburg. It was a fully automatic Mecatherm line for baguettes and baguette rolls. A second line for ciabatta and similar products followed and finally there was a third semi-industrial line for bread



++ figure 3



++ figure 4



loaves and specialty baked goods as well as a new building. The company, whose operation is managed by his son Mike today, delivers predominantly par-baked goods to wholesalers everywhere in the US who in turn supply hotels and the gastronomy sector. Gerhard explains, "We, as suppliers, only know some of our customers, namely the ones who procure the products directly from us or those which we have contact with via our own field staff. Many wholesalers do not want us to be able to identify their customers. Therefore, it is important to us to talk to the gastronomy people at exhibitions, for example, in order to be able to explore their needs." The demand is manifold and ranges from pumpernickel sandwich rolls to very sweet coconut pineapple bread with a Hawaiian touch. A complementary range of soft pretzel products is still imported from Germany; croissants are imported from the Belgian subsidiary Pastridor and Danishes from Schulstadt in Denmark.

Key products of the baked goods range are baguettes in different variations and sizes, including Cuban bread with a piece weight of 481 g (17 oz), recognizable by the longitudinal slash, round and elongated bread loaves, a large selection of sandwich rolls with piece weights between 85 and 255 g and dinner rolls with piece weights between 45 and 80 g. The dinner rolls are also available in a series of mixed packs with 100 or 200 dough pieces each. Almost all products are par-baked. For dinner rolls and baguettes, the company recommends a bake-off time of 8-12 minutes; for sandwich bread 6-8 minutes and 15-18 minutes for the 500 g bread loaves. Many types of dough are made with pre-ferments. Four different types of pre-ferments are produced in plastic drums, as is common in the US and amongst them a weaker form of the acetic acid-dominated San Francisco sourdough.

The production takes place five or six days a week, 24 hours a day. 220 people work in the company, 180 of them in production. The company employs a field staff of 16 which in addition to the Lantmännen subsidiary in Chicago work in certain regions of the country. Customers from the food retail trade or from large food chains are served by the Chicago office. Most of the products are transported by third party logistic companies; some wholesale chains buy their products out of St. Petersburg. The stock in the company's own storage facilities lasts for three weeks. The production plant is not yet operating at full capacity, but expansion is already scheduled. The market for frozen baked goods in the US still offers a lot of expansion opportunities and the supply is still small compared to Europe. +++

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