

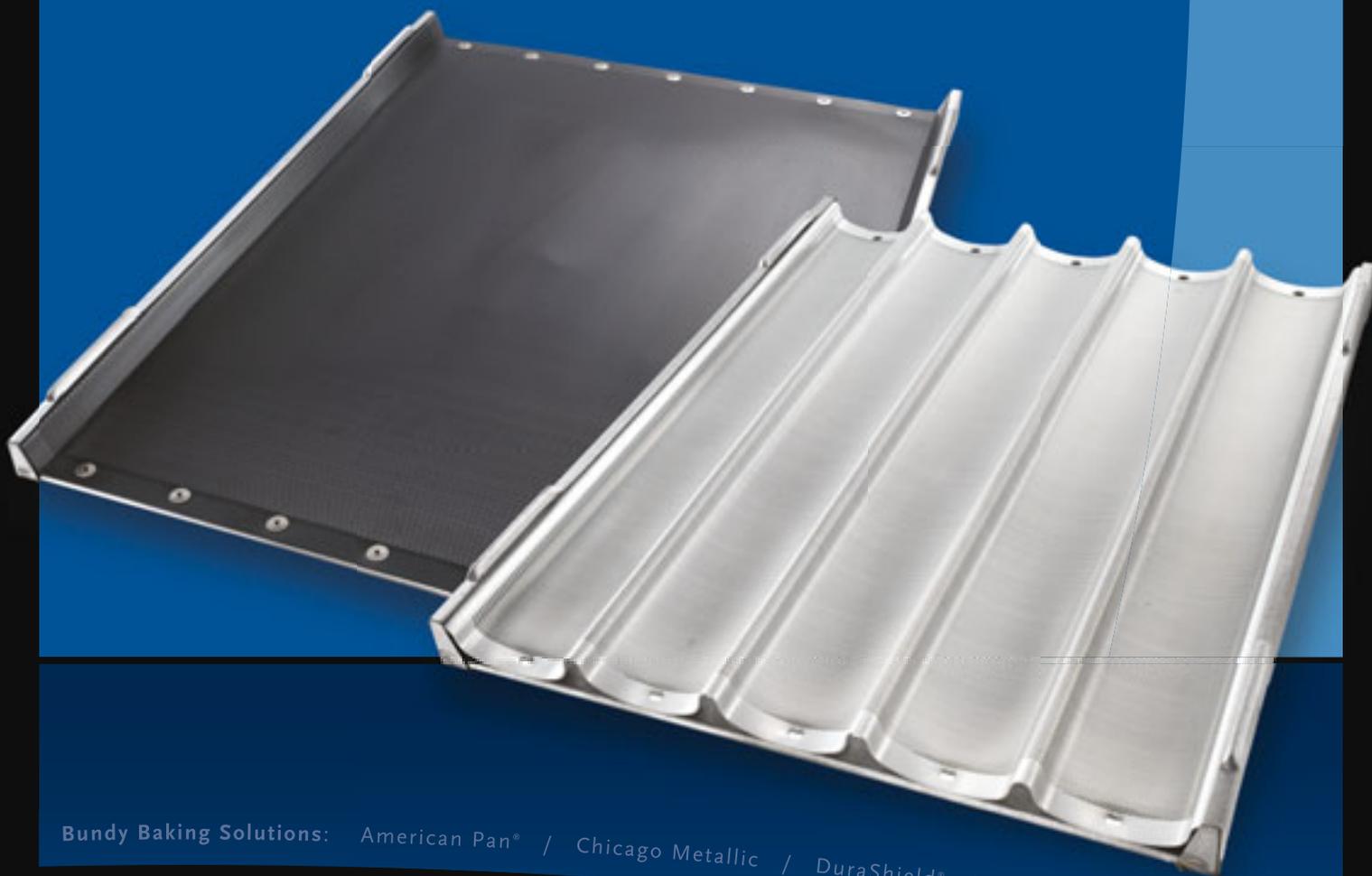
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# When poor hygiene destroys a company

Germany's third largest industrial bakery, the Müller-Brot GmbH Company from Munich, has become insolvent with less than half of the sales outlets being taken over by the new owner. The production works have closed down completely. Approx. 600 employees have lost their jobs and almost 200 franchisees have lost their livelihoods. The logistics provider also went bankrupt due to the losses he suffered, and many other delivery companies are having to absorb more or less painful losses.

There are two things concerning this case that need clarification, and it must be stated that the renowned German love of pettiness, which we ourselves prefer to call thoroughness, was not one of the underlying reasons for the drama.

The first important point can be summed up in the words, "hygiene awareness and hygiene management". I personally travel around the world looking at many bakeries. I have on several occasions been fascinated to discover that hygiene and cleanliness are terms that can be interpreted in many different ways, and a large number of bakers seem blinkered to any shortcomings that their business may have and obviously still believe that because everything is baked, all the microorganisms will be killed off during this process. That is simply factually untrue and needs no further discussion here.

However, the problems at Müller-Brot from Munich-Neufahrn lay more with the corporate leadership and their hygiene management, to which they quite obviously accorded neither importance or personnel resources nor financial investment. Complaints from the supervisory agencies were simply ignored, until the latter could see no other alternative but to close the business down. After several weeks of cleaning and remediation work failed to obtain a renewed approval of production, insolvency was finally declared.

The whole affair will have legal consequences, but probably only for the official Managing Director and Production Manager. The owner, who would have needed to fork out the cash, is likely to remain legally unscathed. It just goes to show that morality is not a legally enforceable concept.

The second important point concerns the public interest which this case triggered in the first place. Although the distribution region of Müller-Brot's branches was limited to Munich and surrounding areas, and that its industrial products could only be bought in southern Germany, the subject of hygiene in food establishments and specifically in bakeries was taken up not only by the regional press but also by national press and by radio and TV as well, and the coverage continued for several weeks. It is still quite impossible to put a figure on the damage suffered by the industry as a result of this, but it is certainly enormous.

The days when hygiene could be regarded as a burdensome duty are long gone, and not only in Germany.

Yours sincerely,



++ Hildegard Keil, Editor-in-Chief

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