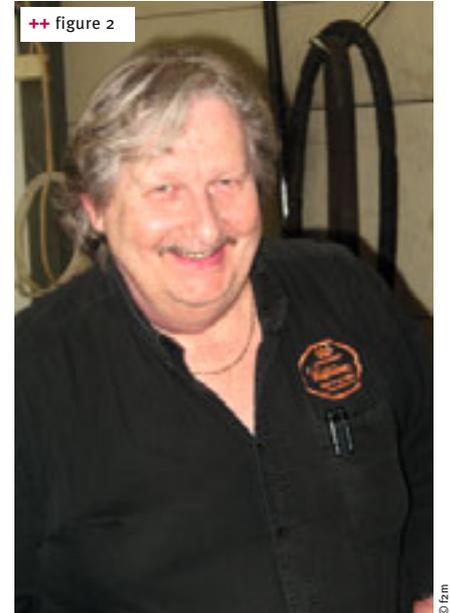


Niche providers

THERE ARE STILL AROUND 500 ARTISAN BAKERIES IN NORWAY. TO SURVIVE, YOU NEED TO ORIENTATE TOWARDS A NICHE MARKET, AS TOM CHRISTENSEN'S EXAMPLE SHOWS



++ figure 1
At the front, "Briks", oblong rolls made from whole meal wheat flour, and at the back, light white breads



++ figure 2
Managing Director Tom Christensen

+ With a total of six bakers and four confectioners in production, 10 employees in packing and logistics along with 20 in the main business within the three branches and the main office, Tom and Unni Christensen from Gressvik near Oslo, Norway, belong to the one of those handcraft businesses that survive having carved out a number of niches for themselves. Almost 80 % of their products appear on the supermarket shelves south of the capital as do their own branded products. Tom Christensen says: "In contrast to industrial production, we can bake bread and rolls in small batches and deliver them to the supermarkets when they're really fresh. Consequently, we complement them extremely well, allowing the supermarkets to raise their profiles". In

addition, they deliver semi-baked goods for the bake-off stations in the supermarkets. In this business area however, they are increasingly feeling the stiff price competition from the frozen food specialists.

First and foremost rolls, but also some breads go to hotels, restaurants, wholesalers and their own four shops, which also specialize in specific niche areas. Two branches are in front of the checkout counters in supermarkets, where they offer an impressive confectionery selection in addition to bread and rolls. In the main business beside the production site the emphasis is on breakfast and lunchtime snacks based on rolls and the last branch has a small selection of both. "Our production site is situated on a busy main road going



++ figure 3
Olive ciabatta rolls in high-yield dough being produced on the new BackTech line



++ figure 4
... and the same with soft raisin buns



++ figure 5

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++ figure 6

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++ figure 5
Homemade crisp bread is one of the products which sets Christensen apart from the supermarket selections...

++ figures 6-8
... along with its pastries



++ figure 7

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++ figure 8

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towards Frederikstad where we have sufficient parking spaces. Many people therefore stop on their way to the factories and offices in the morning and buy a snack fresh out of the brick oven to take away with them. Business peters out from 2 o'clock onwards and from 04:00 we might just as well close", the Managing Director explains. Alternatively, the front bakeries in the supermarkets stay open until the branch closing times of 16:00 or 22:00. Here, too, semi-baked products are regularly put into the oven to be baked freshly there and then, to distinguish themselves from the shelf products.

Production is in two shifts: the day-time shift carries out the preparatory work and the production of dough with long resting times while the night shift begins processing from midnight onwards. Deliveries begin at 05:00. For the bread production a Crustica from WP Haton BV Panningen, Holland for dough forming with intermediate proofer is in use. The remainder of the processing is by hand. One third of the breads, mainly 750 g are baked in forms, the remainder hearth-baked in a 16 m² deck oven alongside three rack ovens.

For roll production, Christensen last year invested in a new line consisting of dough-sheet system, rounder, seeding-station and an automatic panning station from the Austrian equipment manufacturer BackTech/Rosendahl from Pischelsdorf. It processes up to 700 kg of dough per hour into so-called "Briks" – an oblong roll with a piece weight of 80-120 g with various sprinklings. Together with the ciabatta rolls (130 g) which also run on the BackTech, the Briks represent the mainstay of the snack business. The equally popular soft rolls which are usually baked in the shops are also produced on the BackTech line.

Despite the fact that the couple is optimistic as to the future of their own business, it cannot be said that they have no worries. Tom Christensen is only 63, but he has no suitable successor and not just for his own position as owner. Two thirds of his employees in production have been with him for decades, and there is a shortage of young people. Christensen

says: "The young people want an easier life and more leisure time." Money can't be said to be the problem: wages for employees in production were increased substantially two years ago and range from 19 EUR per hour for a beginner on the day shift to just under 30 EUR for the night shift. +++

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