

Do they need two of the same kind?

THE DISPUTE OF THE ITALIAN MANUFACTURERS OF BAKERY MACHINES ON THE AIR SOVEREIGNTY ABOVE SIAB HAS DAMAGED THE FAIRGROUND IN ITALY



✚ This year the traditional Italian bakery exhibition SIAB took place from May 5–9 in Verona. At the same time, the AB Tech Expo – a fair also aimed at bakers and pastry chefs’ – was held in Milan. The reason for this double-tracking was obvious due to the dominance of the three Grandes of the Italian bakery machines industry Polin, Zucchelli and Mondial Forni at SIAB. It was not only colleagues such as Tagliavini who resented this but also main parts of the Italian bakery associations. The conflict escalated and the dominant companies without further ado organized a competing event in nearby Milan. According to their reason-

ing, the Milan fairground is not only more modern and better equipped but is also easier to reach from international destinations. In addition, the parallels drawn with other food fairs such as Tuttofood would offer interesting insights into the product variety of the Italian food market. The renegades also engaged Aldo Tagliabue as organizer. He was the man responsible for the development of SIAB from a once rather unimportant national fair to an internationally acknowledged and well visited exhibition in Verona.

Amongst others, due to the short pre-fair time, it was mainly Italian companies who were represented at the new ▶





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exhibition in Milan. International exhibitors were Bongard, Eberhardt, Fringand, GB Plange, Jeremy, Karl Schmidt, Rondo, Thermohause, and WP. All other non-Italian suppliers were exhibiting their products in Verona. Some of them, Rondo Doge for example, were present at both fairs. The outcome is unsatisfactory for both exhibitions, as not only did they have to share the visitors (according to estimates one third of the visitors were in Milan, two thirds in Verona), but also because obviously a large part of the international audience refrained from coming to Italy in the first place. The absence of international visitors was partly due to the fact that they did not expect to see exciting novelties in Verona or Milan right after iba last October and the recent Gulf Food exhibition in Dubai which was well attended. This has been confirmed. In previous years, SIAB had promoted a visit with the subliminally communicated reasoning "come to Verona for a weekend and visit the fair along the way". However this is obviously not of any interest any longer on an international level. Both exhibitions offered an extensive support program but most foreign visitors could not follow the program due to linguistic reasons.

When attempting to assess the significance of both exhibition places on the Italian market, it must be taken into consideration that the system change on the supplier side is still in its infancy. Small artisan bakeries are still dominating the market although industrial or semi-industrial medium-sized enterprises are beginning to establish themselves. They deliver

their products to the trade, catering services and to large consumers and often also set up their own small net of sales outlets. The number of large industrial companies such as Barilla is very small. Most of the artisan bakers are not serviced by the Italian machine manufacturers directly but rather by local traders who represent several companies, thus offering the baker what he needs. It is more a rule than an

exception that an Italian machine manufacturer does his business via eighty to a hundred representatives within the country. These agents for both sides are the ones that the exhibitors expect as visitors at the fairs. It was also hoped that foreign sales representatives would visit because only a very few Italian companies have foreign subsidiaries or their own offices. Italian suppliers do not have direct

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business contact with the bakers domestically or abroad, and they are operating their businesses mainly via trade partners. With this in mind, the statement Claudia Polin made on the penultimate day of SIAB regarding the very successful fair could only be seen as a political statement since almost all international exhibitors expressed their disappointment and questioned their participation in SIAB the follow-

ing year. For Italian companies, exhibitions are mainly a forum to present themselves to the baking customer, and to initiate and strengthen contacts. As a place for merely maintaining relationships to traders, the exhibition costs in Verona are much too high.

Stefano Benini of Mondial Forni took a more moderate position regarding the question as to whether SIAB 2007 was a flop or a success. Despite the structural

changes on the Italian market, and the increasing significance of the export market and thus the equipment and systems business, he kept in mind the growing share of key accounters of large customers looking for a direct contact to the manufacturer during an exhibition, when he reported that these people also want to get an impression about the company and probably see some reference plants in the country. There-

fore, a “reunification” of both fairs and the strengthening of internationality are important otherwise the exhibition will drop to the level of a regional fair.

In Verona as in Milan, the stand personnel had plenty of idle time. However, the national baking association and the majority of the regional baking associations who acted as co-organizers to the AB Tech Expo were able to mobilize part of their members so that the exhibitors did not only meet traders but also baking customers. International visitors assessed the information value in Milan as similarly inadequate as in Verona but they appreciated the proximity to Tuttofood.

Both exhibitions cannot survive as international fairs if they remain on the 2007 level. As far as AB Tech Expo is concerned, allowances must be made because there was less than 6 months time to convince exhibitors and visitors about the concept. But even a “reunification”, which according to rumors has already been negotiated during the exhibitions, will not heal the damage. The search for an internationally sound concept is needed so that the Italian exhibition can survive next to iba, Europain, Gulf Food, IBIE etc. or degradation to a regional fair will be inevitable. +++

