

Investment boom in Bjelovar

THE FIRST YEARS AFTER THE POLITICAL CHANGES WERE NOT EASY FOR KOESTLIN. HOWEVER, WITH THE END OF THE CIVIL WAR IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA AND THE ENTERING OF THE MEPAS GROUP AS MAIN SHARE HOLDER, THE TIDE TURNED



++ figure 1
After shaping, the pressed and filled strands have to pass through a lye bath before they are baked



++ figure 2
Packaging line for sticks

+ “In the past eight years, we have invested more than 12m Euros in new lines and equipment.” Božica Horvat Vlašić, technical director of Koestlin, a Croatian producer of biscuits and snacks, has worked for more than 32 years for the company in Bjelovar. She is pleased with the positive development of the company since the end of the civil war. This development is due to the entering of the Mepas Group, a private trading and production company, specializing in serving the markets of former Yugoslavia and adjoining countries. The new equipment installed since then includes a complete wafer line with a capacity of 800 kg/h, an extruder line which produces 200 kg curly peanut puffs, coating equipment made by Sollich, a line for the production of sandwich cookies, two lines for sweet cookies supplied by OKA with a capacity of 800 kg/h, a new sticks and pretzel line by WP as well as several mixers and packaging machines. This year, the installation of a second wafer line, supplied by Haas, is scheduled as is the move into a new production building. The number of staff members has also increased significantly. Prior to privatization, there were only 200 people working for Koestlin. Today 580 employees, mainly young people, work there with approximately 360 of them in production. The average age is less than 30.

Bjelovar is a city with 40,000 inhabitants. The distance to Zagreb is nearly an hour by car. The industry present here includes wood and metal processing plants as well as the Croatian cheese making industry. Qualified young academics come from the University in Zagreb and also from a food technology college with a focus on pastry technology. Nevertheless, according to Vlašić, it is getting more and more difficult to find sufficient number of properly qualified employees.

Today, the product range provided by Koestlin (the name is the result of a former cooperation with a Hungarian producer) includes butter biscuits, sandwich cookies, soft biscuits, cookies, wafers, curly peanut puffs and salted snacks. Added to that, traditional spicy Christmas cookies, made according to traditional recipes with classical spices, complement the range in the winter.

Koestlin is not only the oldest company within this branch in Croatia; it is also one of the most important ones in the markets of former Yugoslavia. It is also well established despite the fact that in the interim period international groups and their brands have also become present on the market. Currently the export share is about 50%. Starting with the adjoining market, the company has not only captured the markets in East and West Europe but also the ones in the Middle East and Asia. The connections to the trade in Austria and Germany are good by tradition. About one third of the production is made as private label products. For delivery and dispatch, Koestlin has its own storage facility at the production works, with three of its own storage facilities in Split, Rijeka and Osijek and the use of the warehouses of the Mepas Group.

Filled soft pretzel sticks are amongst the specialty products that Koestlin is well known for. The sticks are made from traditional soft pretzel dough and they are also cooked before baking. However, their interior is surprisingly flavorful. “We started with a peanut filling”, reports Vlašić. Today, the range includes a cheese-paprika filling, a Mediterranean type filling and a sweet filling made with chocolate. For this product, the dough is also flavored with cocoa. The sticks are made on a line produced by WPIB of Tamm near Stuttgart, ▶



++ figure 3
The management team at Koestlin



++ figure 4
Ana Zovkom, Export Manager



++ figure 5
Božica Horvat Vlažić, Technical Director

++ figure 6
Production of wafer sheets on a Haas line

++ figure 7
Production of crème used on the wafer lines

Germany. Dough and filling mass are simultaneously extruded. In a separate station, an agitator ensures that the filling masses in the hopper are kept homogeneously. An infinitely variable dosing pump transports the tempered and subsequently filtered mass through a pipeline to the extruder. The filter is pressure controlled and indicates when it must be cleaned or the flow redirected. This ensures continuous operation. The dough is automatically fed into the high performance extruder Type SP. A grooved roller feeds the dough into the extrusion chamber where it is pressed through nozzles arranged over the entire machine width into thin, endless filled dough strands. The rpm of the grooved roller can be controlled via a frequency controlled AC motor in order to adjust the discharge speed of the dough strands to the speed of the oven belt. Up to 70 endless strands of filled sticks with an internal diameter of at least 2.5 mm and an external diameter of 5 – 7 mm are discharged from the extruder. The complete nozzle supports are interchangeable. The strands are then cut to the desired lengths of between 60 and 200 mm by a travelling guillotine. In general, the filling mass comprises between 20 and 25% of the product, depending on the type

KOESTLIN d.d. Biscuits & Wafers Factory

Slavonska cesta 2a, 43000 Bjelovar, Croatia
The company was founded by Dragutin Wolf in 1905, in Bjelovar, as a small bakery for bread and cakes. One decade later, Wolf started to focus on the production of baked goods with a prolonged shelf life.

In 1932, Wolf entered into an agreement with Koestlin, the Hungarian producer of dry baked goods, for marketing his products based on their recipes. He was also allowed to distribute the products under the Koestlin brand. Following World War II, the company in Hungary changed its name but the name Koestlin in Bjelovar has been kept up until now.

In 1992, Koestlin was transformed into a stock company. Since 2002, the main shareholder has been the Mepas Group from Siroki Brijeg. Mepas is a private company in the personal ownership of Mirco Grbesic. The primary business of the company, founded in 1989, is wholesale and retailing of consumer goods. +++



++ figure 6



++ figure 7



++ figure 8

++ figure 8
Different products

++ figure 9
The Co-extruder made by WP is used for the production of sticks filled with chocolate, peanut, cheese or a Mediterranean type of filling

of filling mass and the type of dough. Similarly, as the traditional pretzel type sticks, the filled sticks are cooked through a lye bath and sprinkled with salt before baking on a continuous oven, also made by WP.

The development team at Koestlin is not yet finished with the development of new variations. Currently, they are exploring new recipes for dough and fillings which may deliver additional nutritional benefits through ingredients such as cranberries, for example. +++

Sticks press by WPIB

The machine is available with working widths of 800, 1000 and 1200 mm. The stick press has also been further developed. Now it is possible to twist two sticks around each other just like a cord. The nozzles are exchangeable and can master a co-extrusion process with temperature controlled nozzles as well as the twisting of the sticks with pulsation free nozzles. +++

++ figure 9

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