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The myth of the high-end product

The situation of the baked goods industry in Europe is currently the topic of numerous lectures which increasingly often take the view that the market is divided into high-end and low-end products, and businesses must in future decide whether they want to manufacture cheap mass-produced goods or elegant specialties.

In my opinion this point of view is incorrect for several reasons.

Firstly and quite fundamentally the market is not a straight line with clearly defined ends, but a highly dynamic structure and thus anything but a straight-forward entity. A product characteristic that attracts no attention today can already be headlines tomorrow.

Who would have asked ten years ago whether a cereal originated from the region, and who foresaw the success of gluten-free products?

Secondly: what is a high-end product anyway? Is it one that consumers regard as high-class because it conforms to their concepts of high quality? In fact such concepts arise to a very great extent from emotional sources, and are satisfied at least as much by the panache of the sales outlet as by the product itself. Don't we all know that a warm baguette will convince (almost) every consumer, quite irrespective of whether it was hand-made by an artisan or emerged from an automatic plant?

Thirdly, these attitudes assume that the development of engineering and technology remains static. The reality is exactly the opposite. Machine builders are currently working on the development of plants that can automatically process very soft doughs with long proofing times, which are then baked in a stone oven and afterwards packed in such a way that they withstand the freezing process while retaining excellent quality, so they need only be thawed out and warmed up in the shop. At a recent event I witnessed how even renowned industry experts were amazed by these baguette rolls. Something that is high-end quality today can already be food for the masses tomorrow.

I could list a whole catalogue of other reasons, but refrain from doing so for lack of space. Don't be confused by the swarms of advisers who are now appearing. They are just looking for worried victims whose anxiety can be turned into money. Anyone who wants to succeed in the market must respond to the consumers' wishes, because that's what the marketability of his products depends on. However, he must also keep an eye on developments in engineering and technology, because they determine his level of costs.

Yours sincerely,



++ Hildegard Keil, Editor-in-Chief
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