

Expanding combination of competence

EQUIPMENT SOLUTIONS' PROVIDER AASTED MIKROVERK HAS BEEN KNOWN PREDOMINANTLY AS A SUPPLIER TO THE CONFECTIONERY INDUSTRY, BUT WITH THE TAKE-OVER OF DFT, THE DANISH COMPANY HAS EXPANDED ITS COMPETENCY INTO THE BAKERY FIELD. BAKING + BISCUIT INTERNATIONAL'S EDITOR-IN-CHIEF HILDEGARD M. KEIL TALKED TO **ALLAN AASTED**, CEO OF AASTED MIKROVERK, ABOUT THE FUTURE PLANS OF THE GROUP



++ figure 1
Alice extruder



++ figure 2
Conny convection oven

+ bbi: Some years ago, Aasted Mikroverk entered the market for bakery equipment with a machine named Alice, an extruder for biscuits as well as chocolate. At the same time, Aasted created an indirectly heated convection oven named Genius, dedicated to the biscuit industry. Recently, Aasted Mikroverk has taken over the Danish Food Technology A/S, an oven manufacturer. What are the reasons behind this latest venture?

+ Aasted: Since the foundation of our company in 1946, we have been working with a combination of chocolate and baked goods. Just think about the many cookie bars such as Kit Kat or biscuits with a chocolate coating such as the ones by Leibnitz. This has been and still is our business. In our opinion, there are plenty of market opportunities for our customers and ourselves in this field. With the development of the Genius oven and later the take-over of DFT, we are expanding our baked goods expertise.

+ bbi: You have also taken this step with Alice, a very flexible extruder. It can extrude three doughs and batters together, strong dough as well as creamy batter. It is available as a mono-head, double-head or triple-head version. Which is the most successful on the market and what are the main products produced with Alice?

+ Aasted: Alice is also a technological cross-over product. Chocolate as well as batters and other masses can be extruded with this equipment which comes with a water heating/cooling system as standard. This way, we achieve a very uni-

form material flow. This is true for dough as well as for pure chocolate masses. Our advantage is the transport of the masses to the dosing head via pressure controlled sinus pumps. The result: very low shear which protects the texture of the masses even if they contain larger particulates such as fruit pieces or chocolate chips.

+ bbi: How is Alice generally accepted on the market?

+ Aasted: The first machine started operation more than four years ago and since then, we have sold more than 20 machines. The gentle dosing and the precise positioning of the masses on the transport belt are very convincing arguments in favor of Alice.

+ bbi: Are all of these machines used in the confectionery industry or is Alice used for non sweet products as well?

+ Aasted: The equipment sold so far has been only supplied to the confectionery industry. Obviously, our staff not only developed the right machine but also they developed it at the right time. For many years now, there has been a trend towards products that are larger than the common piece of filled chocolate but still small enough to be consumed with one or two bites. In this segment, there are many cross-over products made from filled dough and then coated with chocolate.

+ bbi: So, Alice is used in the chocolate industry as well as in the biscuit industry. Could it also be of use for the snack industry?

+ Aasted: Certainly! In my opinion, the premium snack segment in particular holds many marketing opportunities.

+ bbi: Let's talk about the ovens. Aasted has developed the Genius oven while Conny was designed by DFT. Will you offer both ovens in the future?

+ Aasted: To be absolutely honest, we had some difficulties with Genius and this was one of the reasons why we became interested in DFT. They have outstanding oven experts who will now take the best from both ovens, combine it and develop a range concept together with our specialists in Farum.

+ bbi: Are we talking about turnkey equipment? Which type of lines do you offer and what type of work will they be able to handle?

+ Aasted: Our expertise starts with the dosing and extrusion of dough and masses and goes all the way via ovens, coating and cooling to the removal of the products from the belt. In this respect, we cooperate with other partners, for example, in the field of coating plants.

+ bbi: Are we just talking about biscuits or are cakes and fillings included?

+ Aasted: All of them. Mixing and foaming equipment for filling and the pouring of masses are our core competencies; our ovens are perfectly suitable for baking cakes with robots used for the removal of products which can equally be used on cake lines. Today, it is difficult to strictly segregate the different markets. Just look at our Frozen Cone technology. It produces very delicate, extremely thin chocolate cones which can be filled with foam, closed with a biscuit or a piece of cake and then sealed with a chocolate base. No matter what you call it – a biscuit, a cake, a one-bite – it is certainly a premium product with the respective market opportunities. Our expertise includes a specific but broad product range including chocolate, marzipan, nougat, biscuits, cookies, cakes and snacks.

+ bbi: The manufacturers of these treats are suffering from the current financial crisis and the resulting reduced consumption. Are your order books reflecting this situation?

+ Aasted: There are lots of variations. We do business all over the world. Our distribution is mainly via agencies which are known in the confectionery as well as the baking industry as trustful representatives. The market in Russia has calmed down but is not down to zero. North America is currently quieter; this calmness is reflected in prolonged decision making processes. South America, the Middle East and Turkey are running smoothly and Asia is located somewhere in-between.



++ Allan Aasted CEO of Aasted

+ bbi: How have your sales developed in 2008 and in the first months of this year?

+ Aasted: In 2008, we generated the best turnover ever. The first months of this year are also looking good, although, due to the prolonged decision making processes, we are not completely booked in 2009. It is still difficult to assess the situation for the medium to long term.

+ bbi: What is your export volume?

+ Aasted: Outside of Denmark 95-99% and outside the EU about 70%.

+ bbi: Last year, Aasted extended its factory at Farum. What is it to be used for and is it still necessary? Will Aasted DFT manufacture ovens in the plant or are there any plans to combine both factories?

+ Aasted: The ovens are manufactured in Jutland at the DFT site while Alice is built in Farum. We have excellent people at both locations and we do not want to lose their expertise. We cooperate mainly in the utilization of internal resources such as planning, logistics, IT and also in the sales field, in project engineering and in our technical center where we are able to conduct tests on an industrial scale of 1:1. As far as the new building in Farum is concerned, we desperately need the space. After all, we intend to develop Alice into a large family.

+ bbi: When DFT introduced its oven at the last interpack, one of the key selling points was that this oven could be washed down with water. Does the market really appreciate this feature?

+ Aasted: Yes, this feature is of huge benefit. Hygiene is a very important aspect for possible future investment in the baking industry. By the way, Alice can also be completely cleaned wet. All housing and pump parts can be put into a dishwasher. The shafts are monolithic and thus bacteriologically safe.

+ bbi: Aasted used to focus on chocolate. With Alice and Genius, the focus is now shifting towards the biscuit and cake industry. What are the next steps?

+ Aasted: It is our mission that everything we do, we do as best as we possibly can. Therefore, we will not take the second step before the first. Aasted and DFT have to grow together, set up a joint turn key business, develop their product ranges and convince the market with their expertise. DFT has a lot of experience in the design of pizza lines. This might be worth another approach in the future.

+ bbi: Mr. Aasted, thank you for the interview. **+++**