

Belgian Tortillas

POCO LOCO IS SPANISH AND TRANSLATED MEANS: A BIT CRAZY. BUT NEVER JUDGE A COMPANY BY ITS NAME!



✚ The way in which Belgian, Patrick Maselis has set up his tortilla production is not the slightest bit crazy but rather, very clever. “We have taken a close look at the market figures in the US, because this trend will soon spill over into Europe.” Patrick Maselis, General Manager of nv Snack Poco Loco explains the reasons behind setting up a tortilla production in Roeselare, Belgium. Market analyses did not help the agricultural engineer as they were not available in 1989 when Maselis started his first tortilla line.

And market analyses are still not available today. However, there are six tortilla lines now operating in Western Flanders which produce about 30,000 tons of tortillas per year. A new hall is currently under construction for the seventh line which will be installed next year.

“For almost 10 years, our annual sales figures have grown by 25-30%”, reports the restrained Belgian although conveying a little pride in his voice. The annual turnover of Poco Loco in the last year was 125m Euros. Tortillas account for 40% of this figure. The other 60% is achieved with tortilla chips, sauces, spice mixes and dinner kits. The latter business division is about three years older than the tortilla production. Maselis began his business in 1995 with a line for tortilla chips. Here again he followed the principle: Look at what is successful in America. “At that time we discovered that, in the US, more tortilla chips were being consumed than potato chips. Today, Poco Loco operates seven tortilla chips lines. 300 employees work in the company with 120 of them directly involved in the production of wheat tortillas.

The tortilla range of Poco Loco comprises 20 different products, predominately tortillas of different sizes. The dough is also available with spinach or bell peppers. The products can be provided MAP packed, sealed as fresh products or frozen. About 400 different sales packs leave the company since Poco Loco almost exclusively distributes private label products. “Brands are only good for multi-national companies.





One has to go into at least four to six countries and build up the same brand, otherwise, small products such as tortillas will not be successful", reports Maseli. His list of customers includes large, well-known food retailers as well as food service companies. 40% of the Belgian tortillas are for the food retail trade and 60% for catering and food service companies. The main export area is the EU, although tortillas made by Poco Loco are consumed in about 100 countries worldwide. The success of the company is demonstrated by the certificates and trophies which are on display in the meeting room in Roeselare. They identify the company as supplier of the year, 2006, for the retail chain Spar, as entrepreneur of the year in Flanders, as winner of the Golden Clog as the most successful exporter to the Netherlands and as the winner of the Royal Belgian export award.

Maselis is sure that the successful track record of his business will continue. He has good arguments for this: wraps are universal. Everything you can do with rolls, you can also do with wraps. However, wraps cost a quarter less than rolls, require less manual work as they do not need to be cut and spread with butter. They are also an alternative to pita bread.

Maselis cannot predict the future market growth in Europe. But he is satisfied. "It is a nice niche. And a larger one than we could have ever dreamed about." +++

++ figures 1+2

Mexican tortilla made in Belgium: dough pieces are discharged from the press and packed manually



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Gerhard Berssenbrügge, CEO, Nestlé Germany

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