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# From Hamburg to homes: progress in the German meat market



This serving suggestion showcases the surprising harmony of sweet and savory: juicy melon wrapped in crispy, lightly smoked bacon – perfect as an appetizer, finger food, or a summer snack

Danish Crown Foods Germany GmbH, the Hamburg branch of the Danish Crown Group, plays a crucial role in aligning Danish production capabilities with the specific demands of the German market. Located in Hamburg, Germany, the company ensures close customer proximity and delivers fast, tailored solutions across retail and food service sectors. Christian Daub is the Managing Director of this branch, responsible for leading commercial operations including sales, marketing, key account management, and trade marketing.

**European Business:** Mr Daub, the German meat market is considered one of Europe's most demanding. Why is Danish Crown so strongly committed to it?

**Christian Daub:** Precisely because of that. Germany is Europe's largest consumer market, but also one of the most competitive and price-sensitive. At the same time, expectations regarding sustain-

ability, quality, and convenience are rising steadily. For us, that's both a challenge and an opportunity. Danish Crown is a long-term player here. Our success depends on staying relevant with high-quality products, both in retail and food service. As part of that, we've sharpened our brand strategy: Danish Crown Professional now serves as our dedicated brand for the food service sector, while Tulip

remains our established label in retail. This clear separation allows us to address the specific needs of each market more precisely. With the growing focus on transparency and origin, we also see rising demand for trustworthy supply chains – which we can offer thanks to our integrated model.

INTERVIEW WITH



*Christian Daub,  
Managing Director*



**Danish Crown**

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**TULIP**

**European Business:** What's the role of your Hamburg operation?

**Christian Daub:** Hamburg is our commercial centre in Germany, responsible for sales, marketing, key account and trade marketing for processed products. It combines our retail and food service units, which work parallel, but also closely together, especially in development and innovation. With around 30 to 40 employees here and support from external agencies we manage roughly 220 to 230 million EUR in revenue. About 140 million EUR of that comes from retail, where bacon alone represents about half the turnover. We're Germany's leading bacon brand and strong in meat-



A behind-the-scenes look at Danish Crown's production site, where modern processes ensure consistent quality, hygiene and safety



Fresh vegetables, premium meat products, and the Tulip brand – conscious consumers rely on trusted quality at the retail shelf

balls, burgers, and canned goods. In food service, we offer a growing range tailored to professional kitchens – pork and beef classics, but also poultry and convenience innovations like our Crispy Chicken Burger. The Hamburg team aligns Danish production capabilities with local market needs, helping us act fast and deliver relevant solutions.

**European Business:** What is the core of your product strategy?

**Christian Daub:** Focus and depth. We invest in categories where we are strong and can add real value: bacon, meatballs, burgers, and high-quality convenience. In these, we aim for clear market leadership, not just presence. We expand our range selectively, for example with organic or ready-to-eat formats, but always long-term. Everything is tied to consumer demand, product quality, and operational excellence. By working closely with our retail and food service partners, we ensure that innovation is commercially viable. Rather than chasing trends, we focus on consistent improve-

ment, whether through recipes, packaging, or shelf life.

**European Business:** Bacon has a leading position. But is it still a growth market?

**Christian Daub:** Absolutely. Bacon is well established in the UK or Scandinavia, but in Germany it's still underdeveloped. Many consumers don't know how to use it or see it only as a breakfast food. That's why we invest in trade marketing and consumer education – with ideas, recipes, in-store communication, and digital campaigns. The goal is to show bacon as a versatile ingredient for all kinds of dishes, from pasta to burgers. We also see growth in value-added formats and new cuts. It's not a niche, it's a product with untapped potential. And with state of the art production and strict quality controls, we can guarantee a standard that supports trust and encourages trial.

**European Business:** What's Danish Crown's position on sustainability?

**Christian Daub:** As a farmer-owned cooperative, we're directly connected to agriculture, where over 80% of meat-related emissions originate. That gives us both responsibility and the tools to act. Our science-based targets aim for a 50% emission cut by 2030 and climate neutrality by 2050. We support our farmers in reducing emissions, improving feed efficiency, and tracking carbon footprints. We also work

with scientists and retailers to ensure transparency. Especially for private label products, our sustainability performance is closely scrutinized. It is not just a marketing claim, it is embedded in our operations. We also invest in better packaging, food waste reduction, and certified products like organic or animal welfare meat, backed by traceable systems.

**European Business:** Where does digitalization come into play?

**Christian Daub:** Digitalization is essential to stay competitive. Labour is scarce, and complexity is rising. So we use automation for efficiency and digital tools for better planning and control.



Popular Tulip products, conveniently packaged to preserve freshness and support a wide range of uses



The Danish flags stand for Danish Crown's strong heritage, its farmer-owned foundation, and its commitment to bringing Danish quality and values to international markets



Whether for breakfast, pasta, or as a topping – this serving suggestion highlights bacon's versatility in everyday cooking

IN BRIEF



## Danish Crown

### Core Competence

High-quality meat and convenience products for retail and food service, with strong brands, integrated supply chains, and a long-term focus on innovation and sustainability

### Facts & Figures

- Founded: 1887
- Structure: farmer-owned cooperative
- Branch offices: across Europe, hub in Hamburg
- Employees: 26,000 globally, 30-40 in Hamburg
- Turnover: 220-230 million EUR
- Export: global presence, key markets in Europe and Asia

### Products & Services

Retail and food service solutions based on pork, beef, poultry, and convenience. Leading in bacon and meatballs; strong in burgers, canned goods, and ready-to-eat formats

### Target Groups

Retailers, food service providers, and professional kitchens

### Fairs & Exhibitions

Anuga, Internorga, PLMA, and partner events

### Philosophy

Responsibility, quality, and innovation in every product. Combining tradition and modernity, with sustainability at the core of operations

### Future

Sustainable growth with focus on selected categories and brands, digitalization, and CO<sub>2</sub> reduction

In production, AI helps optimize processes and ensure quality. Commercially, data-driven insights guide assortment and pricing. The goal is to combine human expertise with digital intelligence in order to empower people, not replace them. Internally, digital platforms improve collaboration across countries and departments. Speed and shared knowledge are becoming key advantages.

**European Business:** What motivates you personally?

**Christian Daub:** I've always worked with consumer goods – products you can see, taste, and touch. That tangibility motivates me. I enjoy building brands and growing businesses in teams. At Danish Crown, we see our impact in supermarkets or restaurant kitchens. It is also a people-driven business, built on strong cooperation between teams and across national boundaries. Being part of a responsible, forward-looking company adds to my motivation. Personally, I value the mix of

strategy and pragmatism – and the chance to contribute meaningfully in a changing market.

**European Business:** What are your plans for the future?

**Christian Daub:** To grow selectively, sustainably, and with strong foundations. We don't want to be generalists – we want to lead in the categories where we already excel, like pork and beef, while selectively expanding in areas with strong future potential such as convenience, poultry, and organic. That also means making our sustainability efforts more tangible for customers. We will invest in brand visibility, digital tools, and partnerships. Meat remains a key part of a balanced diet. Our task is to offer it in a way that's responsible, enjoyable, and future-ready. At the same time, we aim to strengthen our organization: investing in people, agility, and collaboration to unlock the full potential of our integrated supply chain.

# Reinventing the Beverage Business – 200 Years and Going Strong



For nearly two centuries, Rhodius' services have been in high demand as a contract bottler as well as a producer and distributor of both private-label and branded beverages. Today, the company's portfolio includes strong brands like afri cola and bluna. In his interview with European Business, CEO Hannes Tack shared which market shifts he currently considers most significant – and how his company successfully balances tradition with innovation.



**INTERVIEW WITH**  
*Hannes Tack,*  
CEO



Rhodius has established itself in the market as one of Germany's leading bottling companies

In Rhodius' nearly 200-year history, few moments stand out as distinctly as the year 1958. "That was when we became the first official bottler granted exclusive licensing rights to produce and distribute Pepsi-Cola in Germany," explains Hannes Tack, who is currently running the family-owned company together with his sister. The product range was expanded further in the early 1970s with the launch of Rhodius' own mineral water brand, and in 2015 the company entered into a strong new partnership

with afri cola and bluna. "Offering a broad portfolio of refreshing beverages has always been a cornerstone of our strategy. afri cola and bluna, in particular, are seen by many consumers as charismatic, almost retro brands – with a distinctive flavor, iconic branding, and a striking bottle or can design – making them ideally suited for success in hospitality and gastronomy as well as in both wholesale and retail beverage markets." In addition, Rhodius has built a strong position as a leading provider of canned

beverage solutions through its co-filling services.

## **A unique blend of innovation and tradition**

Shifting consumer preferences continue to open up exciting avenues for innovation. "There is a clear trend toward more natural beverages with lower sugar levels, as well as increasing demand for enhanced mineral waters – often with fruity flavors," says Hannes Tack. "More than ever, consumers expect a wide range of choices." At the same time, in the co-filling segment, ready-to-drink formats are gaining increasing importance as convenience becomes a key factor.

As the company approaches its bicentennial in two years, its distinctive blend of innovation and tradition remains at the heart of Rhodius' identity. "In many ways, we embrace modern and distinctly innovative approaches – for example, by supporting remote work wherever possible, and by promoting work-life balance through flexible working arrangements," explains Hannes Tack. "At the same time, we are deliberately a bit traditional when it comes to values like reliability, quality, and our sense of regional responsibility.

After all, those are the principles that have been making us strong for close to two centuries." Rhodius is also taking decisive steps toward greater sustainability. Since 2018, the company has been able to reduce its carbon footprint by 40% – a figure that continues to decline – through lower primary energy consumption and optimized packaging solutions. "We remain fully committed to these efforts, including the transition away from fossil fuels toward green electricity," says Hannes Tack. "For me, it is a true privilege to lead this company in its eighth generation today – but my crowning achievement would be to pass it on in just as healthy a state as it is now."



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A colourful variety of Eastern Mediterranean dishes – vibrant, fresh, full of flavour



Sharing a meal at NENI is more than just eating – it's about connection, conversation, and enjoying good food together in a lively, welcoming atmosphere



NENI is known for the best hummus in Vienna – and for quality and authentic taste



Ilan Molcho, CEO



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# Built on flavor, driven by heart

From a humble market stall in Vienna to a pan-European food and lifestyle brand: What began in 2009 as a spontaneous family venture has grown into Gumpoldskirchen-based NENI Holding GmbH, a name now known across Europe for vibrant Eastern Mediterranean cuisine, both in restaurants and on supermarket shelves. CEO Ilan Molcho launched the business together with his mother Haya and two of his brothers. He shares how passion, authenticity, and a love of food transformed a small idea into an international success – without ever losing sight of its roots.

**European Business:** Mr. Molcho, NENI has grown from a single restaurant to a pan-European food and lifestyle brand. Did you ever anticipate this kind of growth?

**Ilan Molcho:** Not at all. NENI started in 2009 with no big plan.

My mother, Haya, simply wanted to share her excellent home cooking and create something meaningful with her family. So, we said, "Let's open a place together." The first NENI, at Vienna's Naschmarkt, was opened by my mother and three of her four sons, including me. We were complete outsiders in gastronomy – no experience, no business model. Just passion, great food, and the desire to welcome people. We didn't

start with branding or expansion in mind. The name "NENI" comes from our initials: Nuriel, Elior, Nativ, Ilan. It was deeply personal from day one. We built it as a family project, and everything grew from the energy around it. There was a kind of warmth and openness that people connected with, and that's what pushed us forward more than any strategy.

**European Business:** What sparked the first big step toward growth?

**Ilan Molcho:** One early guest changed everything: Christoph Hoffmann, founder of the 25hours Hotel group. He loved the food, but even more the atmosphere: the lively chaos, the human warmth, the balagan, as we say in Hebrew. He asked if we could open a NENI inside one of his ho-





NENI restaurants are always in unique, characterful locations – like here at NENI am Wasser



Where it all began: NENI at Vienna's Naschmarkt – a bustling hub for food lovers



The Molcho family: Strong family bonds remain at the heart of the NENI story

tels. That was the first expansion. We agreed because it felt right, not because it was part of a grand plan. We now have restaurants in Berlin, Paris, Zurich, Copenhagen, and Hamburg, many through franchise partnerships, especially with 25hours Hotels. But every move had to fit with our values. We never chased growth for its own sake. It had to feel like NENI.

**European Business:** What does the company structure look like today?

**Ilan Molcho:** We created NENI Holding, based in Gumpoldskirchen near Vienna. That's also where we built our production facility, 3,500 m<sup>2</sup> on a greenfield site. Above it are our offices: open, full of life, color, and creativity. Under the Holding, we have four main operating units, three for our Vienna restaurants and one, NENI am Tisch GmbH, for food production. Our franchise company oversees ten international restaurants.

Across the company, we're 200 employees in Austria and 500 employees abroad, totaling 700. And it's still a family business. Our mother develops every recipe herself, Nuriel leads branding and communication, Elior manages the franchise operations, and I run the Vienna units and Holding. We don't refer to our team as 'employees' – they're co-creators. We try to give everyone real responsibility and space to shape things. We believe in structure, but not in bureaucracy. Systems should support creativity, not suffocate it.

**European Business:** What kind of leadership approach does that require?

**Ilan Molcho:** A lot of emotional intelligence and trust. I rely heavily on intuition and on surrounding myself with people who are better than me in their fields. My job is to support and empower them. You can't run a people-first company

just with spreadsheets. Sometimes you have to feel your way forward.

**European Business:** In addition to restaurants, NENI products are now available in retail. How did that start?

**Ilan Molcho:** Our hummus led the way. It's the star of our product line and probably what we're best known for. The recipe comes from our great-grandmother, and it takes three full days to prepare. We've industrialized the process without compromising the soul. No shortcuts. We use raw chickpeas, 100% Ethiopian sesame paste, and top-quality olive oil. No fillers, no palm oil. That attention to detail is what makes the difference. Alongside hummus, we produce other Mediterranean staples like babaganoush and shakshuka sauces, bringing authentic flavors to people's homes.

**European Business:** Where are your products sold today?

**Ilan Molcho:** In Austria, exclusively through SPAR – in about 1,600 stores. In Germany, we're in Edeka and Rewe. Also Migros in Switzerland. Germany is the most important market but also the most complex. It's ten times the size of Austria, and every region has its own decision-makers. So we go step by step, sometimes door to door. The goal is to centralize our listings and bring more NENI products to shelves across Europe.

**European Business:** What's next for NENI, where do you go from here?

**Ilan Molcho:** We're taking it one step at a time. We want to bring the NENI spirit to more cities and expand our retail presence, especially in Germany and beyond. But growth only works if we maintain our core values – that's our non-negotiable.



# “We Consider Each of our Employees a Chef”

From its humble beginnings as a local butchery in Flanders to becoming a pan-European leader in the ready-meal segment, What's Cooking? has undergone a remarkable transformation – not only in scale, but also in strategy and identity. With a fresh brand name and an unwavering commitment to sustainability, the company is setting the table for the future of convenient, high-quality food.



INTERVIEW WITH



*Christophe Bolsius,*  
CCO



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Lasagna remains the star product of What's Cooking?

**European Business:** Mr. Bolsius, today, What's Cooking? can look back on 75 years of culinary excellence and business growth. The name of your company is, however, one of your most recent innovations – what led to that change?

**Christophe Bolsius:** Essentially, our business started out as a small butchery on the outskirts of Ghent in Flanders, founded by a local butcher named Francles Coopman in 1948. While he

devoted all his energy to producing delicious savoury products, he didn't seem to put too much thought into what he wanted to call his company. Maybe that is why he simply named it Ter Beke after a small local river. Today, we operate across 29 different countries all over Europe, and we have experienced especially rapid growth in recent years, both organically and through major acquisitions. Thus, we have long outgrown our original name which is also rather hard to pro-

nounce in most languages other than Dutch, while the many different names of our subsidiaries created some confusion among our strategic partners. That is why we wanted to settle on an easy, fun and friendly new name, and we came up with What's Cooking? as the solution that was perfect for us. With the underlying meaning of this new name, we also open ourselves up in every touchpoint with our stakeholders for their input and issues.

**European Business:** In early 2025, you decided to sell your savoury business to focus exclusively on your ready meals from now on. What were the reasons for this strategic choice?

**Christophe Bolsius:** We had realized for quite some time that the ready meals market still had enormous growth potential, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. We think we are in a unique position to take advantage of this opportunity thanks to our excellent

products and our vast experience, and we want to be able to focus on these goals exclusively from now on.

**European Business:** How different are your products from country to country?

**Christophe Bolsius:** Some products only vary slightly, while others differ greatly – depending on the market and consumer preferences. That is why we employ dedicated R&I teams in every region we operate in who know all the local taste profiles inside out: After all, it is imperative that we understand our local customers completely so that we can offer them the right products with the flavors they like. We know that even neighboring countries can differ considerably from one another: France, for instance, is a beef country through and through, where pork lasagna would have a hard time on supermarket shelves. Across the border in Belgium, however, you're immediately in pork country where hardly any beef is sold at all. The cross-country variations we have to take into account even go far beyond our products alone, because different markets also come with different packaging and sustainability requirements which we need to accommodate.

**European Business:** How important is sustainability to What's Cooking?

**Christophe Bolsius:** Sustainability really lies at the core of everything we do – strategically and in our day-to-day operations. That is also where most of our current innovations are coming from, for instance in terms of the plastic reduction in our packaging where we continue to improve. Since we want to make real headway across all scopes from one to three, we also closely involve our partners in constructive discussions to make our supply chains more sustainable and resilient in the future. At What's Cooking?, we truly feel that we have a strong responsibility for our consumers and for our environment, and we have the clear ambition to be the sustainability leaders in our industry. That is why we invite all our partners to join us on this journey – so that our grandchildren will be able to live happy and fulfilled lives just like us.

**European Business:** What would you consider to be the star product of What's Cooking?

**Christophe Bolsius:** Lasagna is by far our global hero. As a matter of fact, we are widely recognized as 'the' lasagna supplier in Europe, and much of our product portfolio has been built around

it. When we enter a new market with our famous ready-made meals – regardless of whether we do so in the retail or food-service sector – we usually start out with our lasagna. It is after all one of the world's most iconic and beloved dishes, and all of our 1,400 employees – or as we like to call them, chefs – spend their entire workdays dedicated to bringing our consumers the highest quality food products out there. Even though lasagna has been a staple for What's Cooking? for a long time, that doesn't mean we cannot take an innovative approach to it: For instance, a few years ago, we introduced cold lasagna as a new product variation, meant to be consumed as a refreshing summer dish. At the time, this had been unheard of, and it was probably one of our more daring innovations. Our consumers embraced it from day one, though.

**European Business:** What is the ambition of What's Cooking? for the future?

**Christophe Bolsius:** Our dream is to be perceived as the ready-meal partner of choice across all major food-service and retail markets in Europe. We have all product, marketing and R&I capabilities to make that vision a reality, and we are already exploring promising opportunities beyond Europe where there is growing appetite for high-quality, great-tasting meals.

Many consumers are becoming more and more health-conscious, prompting new product lines



business

# Rooted in Rice

Rice harvest in the Great Hungarian Plain

Founded from humble beginnings as an agricultural cooperative in 1948, Nagykun 2000 has evolved into one of Hungary's premier rice producers, cultivating 4,300 hectares in the heart of the Great Hungarian Plain. As explained by Managing Director Tamás Bori, during the recent decades the company has successfully positioned itself in the premium market segment, producing organic and conventional rice varieties that meet the highest international standards. With 130 employees and annual revenues of 5 billion HUF, the company exemplifies how traditional agricultural values can thrive in modern markets. Their commitment to environmental sustainability and premium quality has opened doors to international markets, including exports to China and ongoing contacting to countries in the Middle East and the US.

**European Business:** Mr. Bori, what sets your company apart in today's highly competitive agricultural industry?

**Tamás Bori:** What I find very important is that, following Hungary's political changes during the regime shift, the vast majority of agricultural enterprises ceased to operate as cooperatives and were privatized. However, we are a company that has preserved its cooperative roots, with a young management team adopting the values and traditions set up by the original founding members. Today, we employ around 130 people and cultivate approximately 4,300 hectares in the Nagyunság region. We produce premium-quality puffed rice with high nutritional value, free from artificial ad-

ditives. These are naturally made, high-end products. About one-third of our rice is organic, most of which is sold to a German processor. From there, it reaches not only the German market but also China, the world's leading rice producer country – testament to its exceptional quality. Thanks to its remarkable purity and extremely low heavy metal content, our rice is selected for premium baby food production in China.

**European Business:** How do you balance environmental sustainability with profitability?

**Tamás Bori:** Local production offers significant environmental advantages over imports from Asia and North America. Everything is produced in one location with

minimal transport for packaging. We operate within the Hortobágy National Park and have Biokontroll Hungaria Ltd's certification with annual audits from Chinese and German partners. Our environmental impact is actually positive – e.g. in our production region the population of one very rare bird species has increased from 13 pairs to more than 80 pairs over the past 10 years. This demonstrates that agricultural activity doesn't have to destroy nature; with some additional efforts, we can create beneficial ecosystems while maintaining profitable operations.

**European Business:** What's your approach to international markets?

INTERVIEW WITH  
Tamás Bori,  
Managing Director



**Tamás Bori:** We focus on premium and organic products for environmentally conscious consumers who value quality over just price. Once customers taste our products, they remember the quality – that's the experience we aim for. We are now building our presence in the Middle East region with excellent reception, and we've won new EU contracts. I am presently in negotiation about a possibility to enter the US premium rice snack market. We're building a new solar-powered facility to increase capacity while

maintaining our quality standards. It's not easy entering new markets, but when buyers taste our rice, the quality speaks for itself.

**European Business:** What products define your portfolio?

**Tamás Bori:** On one hand, we offer puffed rice products made with 80% brown rice, known for their excellent nutritional properties. These are available in various flavour combinations – such as with premium Belgian chocolate – but we never use artificial ingredients and prioritize quality over mass production. On the other hand, we also grow our traditional and specialty rice varieties, processing them into both white and brown rice in conventional and organic forms, as well as rice flour made from both types. Our Nagykun rice has been awarded a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) by the European Union, recognizing it as a unique product whose characteristics are closely tied to our specific geographic region and traditional farming practices.

**European Business:** What makes your company culture unique?

**Tamás Bori:** I consider our company a family where people don't just work for money. Of course, everyone works to earn a living, but that's not the main motivation here - people genuinely enjoy working here. As a family-oriented company, I always tell my colleagues that I don't want to be a boss who simply gives orders,

but rather a colleague and a friend. One unique aspect of our company is that 70% of our current colleagues have family connections spanning generations – grandfathers, fathers, and now sons working for us. This means the people working here don't want to leave for other opportunities. This company has sustained families across generations, which I believe is tremendously valuable. When you have such a work culture, colleagues help each other because everyone is committed to quality work, and everyone works for the company as if it were their own.

**European Business:** What is your vision for the company's future?

**Tamás Bori:** I see the future clearly moving toward high-quality, premium products. We are focused on serving environmentally conscious consumers who value eco-friendly and affordable choices. Our aim over the next three to five years is to raise awareness that such products not only exist but are available on both domestic and international markets – benefiting consumers and strengthening our company. I also place great emphasis on human development within our organization. I genuinely enjoy seeing my colleagues grow, succeed, and take ownership of their roles. When people are motivated and find meaning in their work, the team becomes stronger and more united. For us, the key to long-term success lies in preserving our 75-year heritage while embracing innovation and sustainability.



Aerial view of Nagykun's expansive rice fields



Nagykun's rice product range – traditional and organic



Selection of Nagykun's puffed rice products



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Flowering crimson clover and a field of rapeseed contribute to biodiversity and soil health

# Hungary's green growth

INTERVIEW WITH



**László Kőszegi,**  
Owner, CEO



**Dr. Zoltán Gergác,**  
Chairman of the Board



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Climate change is real – and it poses growing challenges to food security. The need for innovative approaches in agriculture has never been more critical. Soil degradation, loss of biodiversity, and declining crop yields are some of the key challenges facing agriculture today. Embracing modern methods is essential for building a more resilient, efficient, and environmentally sustainable agricultural system. Hőgyésvi AgroKémiai Kft. from Hungary is prepared to take on this challenge.

**European Business:** Mr. Kőszegi, could you please share what Hőgyésvi is focusing on?

**László Kőszegi:** We are a group of 26 companies organized into three profit centers: two trading companies and several farms operating on a total of 8,500 hectares of land. Dr. Gergác is responsible for managing 7,500 hectares. Our focus is sustainability, healthy food products, and innovative approaches to agricultural production.

**European Business:** Hungary's agriculture plays a significant role in its national economy. Around 60% of its territory is utilized for agriculture. Considering this, what role does the company play on the market?

**László Kőszegi:** There are around 50 companies involved in agricultural chemicals and products, with four major players; we are number five in the market. In 2022, our three profit centers had an annual revenue of 100 billion HUF.

**European Business:** What were the key milestones on your path to becoming a leading market player?

**László Kőszegi:** The period between 1991 and 1999 was characterized by our entry into the agricultural sector, starting with the distribution of pesticides and seeds, and later expanding into crop products. In 2001, we began acquiring agricultural production companies, including several grain storage facilities. Along the way, we also had to overcome serious challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and a year of severe drought. Since 2022, we have been navigating an agricultural crisis that continues to impact the industry.

**European Business:** How would you describe the product portfolio?

**László Kőszegi:** In addition to various services, Hőgyésvi AgroKémiai primarily offers fertilizers, pesticides, and seeds. Looking ahead, we are actively ex-

ploring new and innovative products, with a particular interest in organic solutions.

**European Business:** How would you describe the current market situation?

**Dr. Zoltán Gergác:** The current market environment is difficult. Farmers are delaying investments, and certain products have been withdrawn from the market. Overall, the market is in decline, and competition is becoming increasingly intense.

**European Business:** In what ways does the company stand out when it comes to overcoming current market challenges?

**László Kőszegi:** We don't just sell products – we provide expertise. Our sales team is highly professional and backed by a solid logistics concept. Our company culture and innovative spirit are our greatest strengths. We benefit from strong team spirit and a positive working atmosphere. Our strict focus on customer needs is another crucial factor.

**European Business:** How do you contribute to a more sustainable future?

**Dr. Zoltán Gergác:** As an integrator and grain trader, we are committed to producing healthy food products and are part of the EU-initiated project "Farm to fork". When it comes to quality, it all starts with traceability; that's why we put great emphasis on certi-

fied processes and strict controls of the grain's origin. At the moment, we are investing in a company that focuses on long-term human health through the use of natural raw materials. In the future, we will concentrate on organic products, especially seeds, not only to further strengthen our market position but also to make a meaningful contribution to a greener future. We are going to develop alternative farming methods and products.

**European Business:** You mentioned both certified processes and innovative farming methods. Could you give a concrete example of how these approaches work in practice?

**Dr. Zoltán Gergác:** European agriculture is undergoing a period of significant disruption, largely due to climate change. We see this as both a challenge and an opportunity to drive meaningful transformation within the sector. For this reason, biodiversity will be essential. Instead of relying only on corn, wheat, and sunflowers, we need to explore new plants and innovative methods to revitalize our soils. Microbiomes play a key role in sustainable agriculture. Soils provide vital ecosystem services such as biomass production and biodiversity conservation. This year, we already harvested 17 different plant varieties.

**European Business:** Looking ahead, which areas of innovation will be most important for your sustainability strategy?

**Dr. Zoltán Gergác:** We want to produce healthy food products, particularly oils and proteins. To ensure consistent quality and sustainability, we are committed to managing the entire value chain – from cultivation to the final product.

**European Business:** Have you already presented new products?

**Dr. Zoltán Gergác:** Yes, we even won an innovation award for our cold-pressed flaxseed at a trade fair in London. Besides, we use black cumin, pumpkin, millet, and chickpeas. However, it is not easy to convince farmers to adopt new, innovative products, whereas consumers are a lot more open-minded.

**European Business:** What challenges do you anticipate in the future?

**László Kőszegi:** Challenges like climate change and depleted soils are complex scientific issues. That's why we must rely on experts and researchers to develop sustainable solutions. And we need to act now – so that we can pass on valuable resources to the next generation.



Dr. Gergác regularly gives lectures on sustainable agriculture



Microbiomes are essential for healthy soils



The company is interested in innovative plant varieties that are better able to cope with climate change





The Segafredo brand is one of the best known coffee brands in the world...



...standing for coffee culture at its finest

# “Coffee is more than a product – it is part of a culture”

With brands such as Segafredo, the Massimo Zanetti Beverage Group is among the most significant coffee companies worldwide. In conversation, Group CEO Pierluigi Tosato shares his views on the dynamics of the global coffee market, the challenges posed by climate change and speculation, and the importance of internationalization, corporate culture and digital transformation. It soon becomes clear that for him coffee is not just a business, but a cultural asset and a personal mission.

**European Business:** Mr. Tosato, since April 2024 you have been Group CEO of the Massimo Zanetti Beverage Group. What prompted you to take on this role?

**Pierluigi Tosato:** I have held many different positions during my career – from mineral water to canned food to olive oil. Coffee is, to me, the logical continuation of this journey. For almost 30 years I have led international companies, lived in five countries and learnt several languages. When Massimo Zanetti Beverage Group approached me, I saw the opportunity to lead a company steeped in

Italian tradition into a new era. My aim is to unlock the full potential of this global brand.

**European Business:** What distinguishes the Massimo Zanetti Beverage Group?

**Pierluigi Tosato:** We generate annual revenues of around 1.2 billion EUR, operate 20 production sites worldwide and are present in over 100 countries. Our flagship is the Segafredo brand, which has its roots in Italy but today ranks among the best-known coffee brands globally. About 90% of our turnover is achieved abroad

– proof of just how international we are.

**European Business:** Internationalization sounds like a major strength. How does it shape your business model?

**Pierluigi Tosato:** Coffee is popular everywhere, but the way it is consumed varies greatly. In Italy, espresso is the standard; in Germany, filter coffee prevails; while in Asia, coffee-to-go is increasingly widespread. That is why we rely on a ‘glocal’ model: we act locally, embedded in our markets, but with a global brand strategy. This



INTERVIEW WITH

**Pierluigi Tosato,**  
Group CEO



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gives us consistency in positioning while maintaining proximity to consumers.

**European Business:** What role does corporate culture play in this global approach?

**Pierluigi Tosato:** A very significant one. I have introduced a matrix organization that better integrates markets with central functions. At the same time, I rely on a mix of experienced professionals and new talent. For me, culture means living by certain values: flexibility, openness, and the readiness to view crises as



Care you can taste: a coffee grower inspecting coffee cherries

opportunities. In that sense, we Italians perhaps have an advantage – we are used to coping with instability.

**European Business:** You have spoken of transforming the company. What does that involve?

**Pierluigi Tosato:** Partly the brand itself. Segafredo is an iconic name, but we want to infuse it with more emotion. Coffee is more than a product – it is part of a lifestyle. That is why we are working on refreshing the brand to appeal to younger consumers. At the same time, we are pushing ahead with digitalization. Direct contact with customers via e-commerce or digital platforms is crucial if we want to remain relevant in the future.

**European Business:** How do current market conditions – climate change, raw material prices, speculation – affect your business?



Well attended at every trade fair: the Segafredo exhibition stand

**Pierluigi Tosato:** In recent years we have experienced a 'perfect storm': the price of raw coffee rose at times by over 300%. The reasons lie in climatic changes in Brazil and Vietnam, but also in growing demand from emerging markets, where young people are increasingly replacing tea with coffee. Added to this is speculation on commodity exchanges, making the market extremely volatile. For us, this means ensuring stability along the entire value chain – for example through projects in producing countries that guarantee fairness and sustainability.

**European Business:** Sustainability is a key topic. How are you tackling it in practice?

**Pierluigi Tosato:** We want to work closely with farmers to ensure fair

prices and long-term prospects. For me, sustainability is not only about ecological responsibility but also about social justice and economic stability. If farmers cannot make a living, the basis of our business collapses. At the same time, we invest in packaging and products that are more environmentally friendly, such as compostable coffee capsules.

**European Business:** You speak with palpable passion about your work. What drives you personally?

**Pierluigi Tosato:** In Japan I discovered the concept of Ikigai – the 'reason for being', the motivation to get up in the morning. For me, that is transforming companies and brands. I want to realign organizations and breathe fresh energy into them. If these brands are Italian, all the better. I see it as part of my mission to make Italian entrepreneurship a success on the global stage. We aim to grow profitably, reposition our brand globally and establish a culture of flexibility and innovation.



# Mastering Microbial Precision



Deep research: Customized fermentation solutions are developed in Alce's in-house laboratory for global dairy markets



The new site in Novara reflects Alce's focus on growth and modern production

Fermentation is more than a process, it's a philosophy. At Alce s.r.l. in Novara, this mindset has shaped a family company into one of Europe's leading specialists in fermentation solutions. With 75 years of experience, Alce combines traditional microbiology with cutting-edge technology – and shows that scaling up doesn't mean losing your roots.

"We were born out of a need in the cheese industry – and we still work closely with our customers," says Federico Bruno, CEO of Alce s.r.l. In 1950, Mario Mogna, the founder, pioneered natural starter cultures for Gorgonzola – well before the market demanded them. "He collected milk from dairies, turned it into starter cultures and brought it back for testing," he explains. Under Giovanni Mogna, the son of the founder and long-time managing director, the company expanded by introducing freeze-dried cultures. "The Mantova site is our fermentation hub," Federico Bruno explains. "It ensures consistent quality for international clients." Today, exports account for half of the business, reaching Europe, the Middle East, South America and increasingly Asia and North America. But growth never meant uniformity. "Each client has specific needs – Alce

offers starter cultures tailored to cheese, yoghurt and fermented dairy. We don't just sell products. We develop customized solutions," he says. Technologists analyse production environments and create precise starter cultures based on product goals and local processes.

## Tailored innovation, from lab to dairy

A key asset behind this customization is the company's historic strain library. "It's the core of our identity," says Federico Bruno. "We believe tradition and innovation are not opposites – they are partners," he adds. A new production site in Novara is now under construction and will offer expanded capacity along with modern energy efficiency. "The new plant reflects how we think: future-ready, but rooted." The company is also preparing

its first sustainability report and implementing a corporate code of ethics – proactively, not reactively. Meanwhile, new segments are being developed: a bakery fermentation line is planned for early 2026, and R&D in animal nutrition is underway.

## Expertise and continuity

But beyond the technical edge, it's the people that make the difference. "We still operate like a big family," says Federico Bruno. "Our people stay, because they are heard, trusted and essential." Low staff turnover and long-standing expertise have become a clear advantage for us and our clients alike. "Our specialists often respond within hours – with solutions that are practical, precise and reliable. That service culture sets us apart and creates real value in day-to-day operations." As fewer companies in the sector



INTERVIEW WITH  
*Federico Bruno,*  
CEO

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Alce offers starter cultures tailored to cheese, yogurt and fermented dairy

remain true producers, Alce sees its identity as a strength – and its people as the key to sustaining it in the long term.

# Turning Waste into Value

In the sterilizer, the meat-and-bone mass is heated to between 122 and 134 °C in order to sterilize it and evaporate the water



## INTERVIEW WITH

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**BIOSIRK**  
NORGE

Meat industry by-products shouldn't go to waste, Lars Aashammer makes sure to emphasize: His company, Biosirk Norge, processes them so they can be used to generate energy, feed livestock or be used for pet food downstream in the supply chain. In his interview with European Business, he explains how sustainability continues to drive his company's ideals and how he intends to enter exciting new markets in the near future.

"To be honest, our production processes are actually quite straightforward", explains Lars Aashammer, CEO of Biosirk Norge. "We receive leftovers from the meat industry or fallen stock, which we feed into an industrial crusher.

The resulting mass is then treated with extensive heat between 122-134 °C to sterilize it and evaporate all the water. Naturally, this is a highly energy-intensive step, but a necessary one for now. Once all the moisture is gone, we use a screw press to separate the fat from the meat-and-bone meal: our finished products."

The extracted fat is then burnt to generate steam in factories or sold to a Danish start-up company that uses it for biodiesel. The company's category one and two meat-and-bone meal is used as a

renewable fuel source to generate energy by Biosirk Norge's customers, or as a more sustainable substitute for less environmentally friendly raw materials in Norway's cement industry.

"Category three bone meal is where it starts to get truly interesting", explains Lars Aashammer, before acknowledging significant regulatory hurdles: "Most of the bone meal we produce currently goes to pet food, which isn't bad. Naturally, though, it would be more sustainable and profitable to use it for feeding livestock in the meat industry. Currently, the European Union is the only major world region that bans this, a legacy of the decades-old mad-cow disease scare that still shapes European food production legislation." Other global markets have

begun to react to said restrictions, with Vietnam recently restricting bone meal imports: a move that quickly sent prices tumbling.

## Closing the Loop

The legal exception made for using bone meal in aquafood production meanwhile provides an opening into a new profitable market: "In the near future, we plan to supply Norwegian salmon producers with poultry meal – but as a relatively small company, we will only be able to provide them with a fraction of the amounts they really need. If we are successful, though, we intend to scale up our capacity to meet more and more of the salmon industry's demand", says Lars Aashammer.

A scale-up that may also increase the sustainability of Biosirk Norge's own production processes. "Our current volumes are so small that we haven't transformed our production to the wet method which is largely used in Europe these days, because it is somewhat more energy-efficient. We may do so with increasing levels of output in the future", explains Lars Aashammer.

Regardless of overcoming regulatory restrictions and seizing new market opportunities, Biosirk Norge's overall ambition will remain the same: "Our mission is to close the loop in the meat industry by turning raw materials that used to be discarded into something valuable", Lars Aashammer concludes: "That is what drives every one of us at Biosirk Norge."

# Spreading Success in the Cheese Market



Even after 200 years, ERU Goudkuipje is still the uncontested star of ERU's product portfolio



INTERVIEW WITH  
*Audrey van Ham,*  
Co-CEO

Having recently been acquired by the industrial cheese manufacturing trailblazer St. Paul Group, the Royal ERU cheese manufacturer, the Netherlands' second best-known cheese brand, now boasts investment and growth opportunities for the future unparalleled in its 200-year long history. Co-CEO Audrey van Ham laid out the company's current marketing and product-mix strategy and its ambitious growth trajectory for the future.

**European Business:** The story of Royal ERU seems to be closely intertwined with the history of processed cheese in the Netherlands.

**Audrey van Ham:** That's absolutely true. Our company was founded nearly 200 years ago by Egbert Ruijs — hence the abbreviation ERU, which we proudly carry

in our name to this day. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, he developed the first processed cheese products and began producing them in one of the country's very first cheese spread factories. His main goal was to create long-lasting, easily transportable products — particularly for use by the Dutch

armed forces at the time. Over the past two centuries, we have continuously refined our recipes and expanded our portfolio. A particularly important milestone was achieved in 1959 with the launch of ERU Goudkuipje, made from premium Gouda cheese. That product marked our breakthrough in the B2C market and remains the cornerstone of our product

range to this day. Since 1999, we have had the honor of carrying the 'Royal' designation in our name — a mark of heritage and distinction that we proudly celebrated again last year on the occasion of our 200th anniversary.

**European Business:** How broad is your product portfolio today?



Creamy and delicious: European markets outside of the Netherlands won't be able to resist much longer

**Audrey van Ham:** At its core, ERU is still a processed cheese brand. But under that umbrella, we now offer a wide variety of products in supermarkets, snack bars, food service outlets, and throughout the B2B sector. Alongside our classic ERU Goudkuipje, there's ERU Balans, a lighter version, and a growing range of premium cheese products featuring varieties like Brie, Bleu, and Truffle which have recently hit the shelves at Dutch retailers like Albert Heijn. We have also introduced a kid-friendly version with less salt and more calcium. One of our latest innovations is ERU Zuivelkuipje, a natural Dutch cream cheese with a particularly pure character. Within the B2B segment, St. Paul specializes in customized cheese solutions designed to meet the diverse needs of many different applications such as pizza, pasta, savory snacks, and the quick-service restaurant sector.

**European Business:** Two years ago, Royal ERU was acquired by the St. Paul Group. What

impact has this had on your business since?

**Audrey van Ham:** Being part of the St. Paul Group gives us unprecedented leverage for increasing our capabilities and our future growth potential, especially when it comes to investment in state-of-the-art production facilities. Right now, the St. Paul Group is building the "Factory of the Future," which is slated to go live in the first quarter of 2026. Once completed, it will be the largest and most advanced cheese factory in Europe. At the same time, our acquisition by the St. Paul Group prompted us to re-evaluate our sales channels and market strategies. In this light, we have made some tough but necessary decisions — for example, putting our exports to Japan on hold, as that market proved to be unprofitable. On the flip side, we are doubling down on key international markets like Belgium, Germany, and Portugal. Over the next few years, our goal is not only to maintain our position

as the second most recognized cheese brand in the Netherlands, but to become Europe's leading producer of processed cheese.

**European Business:** What kind of company culture will you rely on to achieve these ambitious goals?

**Audrey van Ham:** Both ERU and the St. Paul Group are family-owned businesses — which means that values like trust, reliability, and mutual respect have always been at the heart of how we operate. We remain committed to upholding those values in our day-to-day operations. At the same time, we firmly believe that true quality is the foundation for long-term success in any market. When two companies like ours come together, it is critical that the cultures be compatible with one another, even if a perfect match is rarely possible. For me personally, our deep passion for our products is especially important, as is my appreciation for the people who make this company what it is. Seeing them grow both professionally and personally and embrace new challenges is incredibly rewarding for me on a very human level.

**European Business:** How do you plan to position your company across these markets in the future?

**Audrey van Ham:** We are pursuing a consistent 360-degree marketing approach that spans traditional B2B and B2C channels, a strong social media presence, and participation in trade fairs across Europe. Additionally, we are actively involved in a broad range of sponsorship initiatives. Looking ahead, one of our key focus areas is sustainability. We are continuing to optimize not just our processes, but also our facilities — for example, by generating our own electricity through photovoltaic systems and improving our packaging solutions. In this way and beyond, we are combining 200 years of experience and expertise with a continuous drive for innovation and a product range that truly stands apart. For us, it's about combining tradition with progress, expertise with curiosity, and consistency with fresh ideas. That's the mindset we bring into the future — every single day.



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