



# Cheese from Bruges becomes a true brand

In the endless polders of Flanders, cows and dairy farming have been shaping the life of farmers and dairy companies. Local dairy products have a high reputation in the Belgian market and are facing increasing demand from the consumer. At the same time, local cheeses have found new followers, and according to surveys, Belgians seem to like their cheeses. In 2007, some 20% of the cheeses sold were of Belgian origin. Consequently, it was only a logical move by Belgomilk cvba to invest in its cheese-making factory in Moorslede. Even more, the company has strengthened the branding of its cheeses. Brugge Cheese has become a real brand, including a wide range of significant cheeses from Bruges plus a range of other cheese specialities.

The high investment at its production site in Moorslede has been a congenial move for Belgomilk to strengthen its presence in the Belgian cheese market. Today, it has become the second largest milk processing company in the country. When it comes to volume figures, it even ranks at the top in Belgium. "We have decided that we have to

present our cheese range adequately. A re-branding, or better setting up one single brand for all the cheeses, can only have a positive impact on our market presence and will lead to increased sales figures," says Commercial Director Sales and Marketing Hugo Demullier. "Moreover, we are determined to conquer the foreign market. Here, the main

focus is on our neighbouring countries Germany, the Netherlands and France. Sales activities in Spain have only just started."

## Leading milk processing company

Belgomilk has pumped about 40 million EUR in the cheese-making site at Moorslede in order to double its production capacities. The leading milk processing company is part of the Milcobel Group, one of the multinational dairy production companies in Europe. "Milcobel, our parent company, is a top player in the milk business internationally," says Mr. Demullier. "As a cooperative, it is in the hands of 3,500 national farmers. It was set up after a merger of Belgomilk with another national dairy cooperation, the Belgian Dairy Union. Within this group, Belgomilk is by far the most important milk processing company."

## New consumer-oriented strategy

Belgomilk operates in the B2B segment and in the B2C market alike. "Since 2007, this division has been in existence to improve its market position in the consumer market.

The re-branding of our cheese-producing division, mainly located in Moorslede, has been a direct consequence of this new consumer-oriented strategy."

The Belgomilk division for cheese and butter for consumers now concentrates on cheese specialities and on brand cheese. The company has likewise developed new types of cheeses and the Old Brugge no longer stands alone; however, it still stands out as one of the old cheese types Belgomilk has to offer. "Old

**"Old Brugge is our top cheese."**

Brugge, the mature cheese, has been in the market since 1992, and it has developed into a traditional cheese in the Belgian cheese market," stresses Mr. Demullier. "But from 2009 on, Old Brugge is the star in the Brugge Cheese range."

## The new cheese look

All the cheeses of Brugge Cheese – or better Brugge Kaas – now a registered brand, are subject to the same corporate design. "We are using the name of our hometown Bruges in its

original spelling, even for the international market. The name Brugge is associated with the town and its centuries-old history. The name in a way also refers to the craft of cheese making which has lived on in Belgium for many centuries," explains Mr. Demullier. "The Brugge Cheese

than the old type." The Brugge Cheese portfolio also includes a range of slightly creamier and softer cheeses like Brugge Gold, Brugge Classic or Brugge Apero, a sandwich cheese of a soft, creamy flavour and added mustard and fenugreek seeds. "Since the intro-



The slow maturing process gives Nazareth its distinctive aroma

has got a dark brown logo with a writing in Caxton, a letter type which is named after the printer of the first book in Bruges in 1453. This corporate design is underlined by a colour code. Every Brugge Cheese has the same logo but its packaging has a special colour. Old Brugge, for instance, has a black rind."

## The Brugge range

No doubt, Old Brugge is the star of the product portfolio. After it has matured for an entire year, the cheese develops its exquisite flavour. It has a rich taste and a low salt content. "I would recommend it for an opulent cheese buffet dinner," points out Mr. Demullier. "It has become a reference in itself in the cheese market. It is now also available as Brugge Semi-matured – with a maturing time of four months – and Brugge Young which matures for at least five weeks. It is creamier

duction of the brand Brugge Cheese, we have had positive feedback from the retail trade. Our cheeses seem to meet the taste of the consumer," adds Mr. Demullier. "The new positioning in the market will also affect our international activities. In 2008, we started to export our products to the vast German market and to the Netherlands. Already some years before, we introduced our cheese and butter in France. Cheese from Belgium has become a trademark for quality cheese with a special natural flavour. We are going to expand this image."

## Cheese specialities

Brugge Cheese might be the most popular brand, but, in addition, Belgomilk produces various other specialities like the famous Nazareth, which has been produced since 1995 in the Nazareth

village. "Due to the slow maturing processing, Nazareth has a subtle aroma. Now we have introduced a light version, which aims at salt- and calorie-conscious consumers as it contains only 15% fat," says Mr. Demullier. "St. Maarten Original is a light cheese which we have been selling for 25 years. It shows a mild and fine flavour."

Naturally, for a Belgian cheese-maker, special abbey and beer cheeses must not be forgotten. Beer and cheese have always formed a close partnership in Belgium. The Watou,

**"Our re-branding will strengthen our market position."**

a famous abbey cheese, was first made in the village of Watou. The cheese production at Moorslede has its origin in the dairy-brewery of St. Bernardus in Watou, where the two businesses were housed at the same premises.

"We have picked up the old tradition of cheese and beer. Our six special abbey and beer cheeses complement most perfectly the vast range of Belgian abbey beers," says Mr. Demullier. "The taste of each abbey cheese harmonises with the corresponding abbey beer."

To round off the cheese assortment, Belgomilk offers a range of different speciality butters, which are available salted or unsalted. Dixmuda or Nazareth, for instance, are made using fresh cream from only the best milk, without any colouring or preserving agents.

## Translating trends into products

"Our cheese and butter assortment has convinced the market. The re-branding has had an additional positive effect on our company's development. For sure, the enormous investments will pay off," states Mr. Demullier. "We have become a most respected partner in the retail business and are considered to offer high-quality products to the retail

sector. Our customers appreciate the flexibility we offer in the cheese portfolio."

Belgomilk aims at translating the current trend into products. Apart from cheese, it also takes into account other factors like packaging. "The market for cheese is still growing slightly. But we have observed a clear trend towards sliced cheese. We are going to meet this development with adequate product packaging."

## Positive reaction on re-branding

Last year, Belgomilk could generate a turnover of 47 million EUR and it employed a workforce of 103 people at its Moorslede site. In comparison, the entire Milcobel Group employs about 2,500 people.

Belgomilk is optimistic about its future development. "In Belgium we aim at increasing our sales figures after our re-branding. We are working hard to expand our export activities abroad. Moreover, we are going to strengthen our partnerships with our retailers," points out Mr. Demullier.

Belgomilk is proud of its efforts to become the leading address for best Belgian cheese. ■



A new brand is born – Brugge Cheese



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