

German yoghurt major goes for bottles

J. Bauer GmbH & Co. KG in Wasserburg, Bavaria, have always been among those in the industry who have been first in adopting new trends. Even around the Millennium, when few gave a chance to plastic bottles in the German carton-dominated dairy business, Bauer has been one of the pioneers to invest into that kind of packaging for yoghurt drinks.

During the first months of running their first yoghurt bottling plant in 2001, Bauer recognised plastic would soon become a major drive for their business as well as for the market. Hence, they decided on a major investment – a new high-tech, high-volume plant was inaugurated at the end of 2004. Today, one fifth of their total packaging capacity of 1 billion units p. a. in the sole Bauer plant in Wasserburg is dedicated to filling yoghurt drinks in plastic bottles.



"The big Bauer", branded fruit yoghurt in 250 g pots, received its liquid equivalent (photos: Bauer)

As there was no space to squeeze-in the new filling and packaging capacities, Bauer first had to build a new production hall. Of course, this was not a small-scale project. Plant

Manager Jürgen Green explains: "We built the new hall for the future. We will be able to double capacity if required and still will have sufficient space for all peripheral functions such as stocking packaging material and bringing it to the



Florian Bauer:

“We have just launched a firework of innovation.”

(photo: EDM)

filling lines.” Meanwhile, the new plant has reached full capacity. Its core is a linear filler supplied by Ampack Amman that is mainly producing bottle formats between 100 and 330 ml. Bauer’s first filling line from 2001 was built for filling volumes of 100 and 250 ml. This production line is currently working at 60 per cent capacity but Bauer intend to bring that to 100 per cent very soon. “We are happy to have capacity reserves,” says Florian Bauer who is working in the management of the family

Pallets are automatically brought into the high-bay storage (photo: Bauer)



Part of the bottles are sleeve-labelled while other bottles are sourced ready for use (photo: Bauer)



**J. Bauer GmbH & Co. KG
Milchverarbeitung**

The Wasserburg-based family company Bauer, posted sales of € 300 m based on a milk intake of 185 m kg and 490 employees. Bauer has processed 114 m kg into fresh products and another 40 m kg into specialty soft and semi-hard cheese. 30 m kg of their milk was contract dried and later fed back into their processing. Bauer manufactures some 300 fresh product items in over 100 varieties. Having managed the company for decades, senior boss Ulrich Bauer is now gradually handing over the company to his sons Wolfgang and Florian.



Bauer introduced the first smoothie product to Germany (photo: Bauer)

company. "We are now burning off a firework of innovation with emphasis on bottled products."

Bauer has not only introduced dairy products in plastic bottles under their own brand, which is among German market leaders, but also under a number of retail labels. At the core, however, are the brands "Der große Bauer" ("The big Bauer" hinting to their 250 g fruit yoghurt pots), the sub-brand "Fit & Aktiv" as well as "Biene Maja", a licensed brand targeting children, and another licensed brand, the famous Swiss "Mövenpick" which stands for the ultimate in premium. This brand is

exactly what Bauer used for introducing the first smoothie products to the German market.

Currently, Bauer uses only preformed HDPE bottles in two basic shapes supplied by Alpa and Greiner packaging on a just-in-time scheme. As Mr Green says, filling volumes have not yet reached a point where their own bottle blowing operations will pay off. In any case, when that moment comes, he would prefer a hole-through-the-wall venture with one of the packaging suppliers. Still not decided is if Bauer will also introduce PET bottles. The packaging material is directly fed into the bottling operation without the need for it passing through other parts of the plant in Wasserburg. While the older bottling line uses only pre-sleeved bottles, the new line has its own sleeving. Sleeves are stored in a separate air conditioned room.

What has made the management of Bauer especially proud is that they did all the project planning and engineering themselves. An own-team of experts consisting of two process, two mechanical and one electrical engineers sourced the equipment from not less than 17 suppliers from seven countries putting it all into a well operating status. The team was given



Plant Manager Jürgen Green:

“ We have built the new filling hall for the future. ”

(photo: EDM)

only 18 months for the project including building of the new hall. As Green confirms, they missed the deadline by only 14 days. Part of the investments were six ripening tanks (15,000 litres each for optimum batch runs) supplied by Abab, linking-up the energy and supplies to the main plant as well as linking-up the production to the existing chilled high-bay storage.

Equipment suppliers were: Posimat (bottle erector), Ampack Ammann (linear



Bauer's new bottling plant (photos: Bauer)



The "Biene Maja" range of children's products was extended by portion bottles of different yoghurt drinks (photo: Bauer)

ultraclean filling machine), Paxona (conveyors), Heuft (bottle inspection), Arol (capper), Graham (sleever), Cama (grouping of four-packs), Buhmann (inserter), Pan (palletiser), Stöcklin (pallet transport), Swisslog (linking to storage), KMW (air conditioning), Haas (energy piping), PAT (product piping), ProLeiT (automation). The results of the complex project can match any turn-key operation: the line efficiency is 95 per cent.