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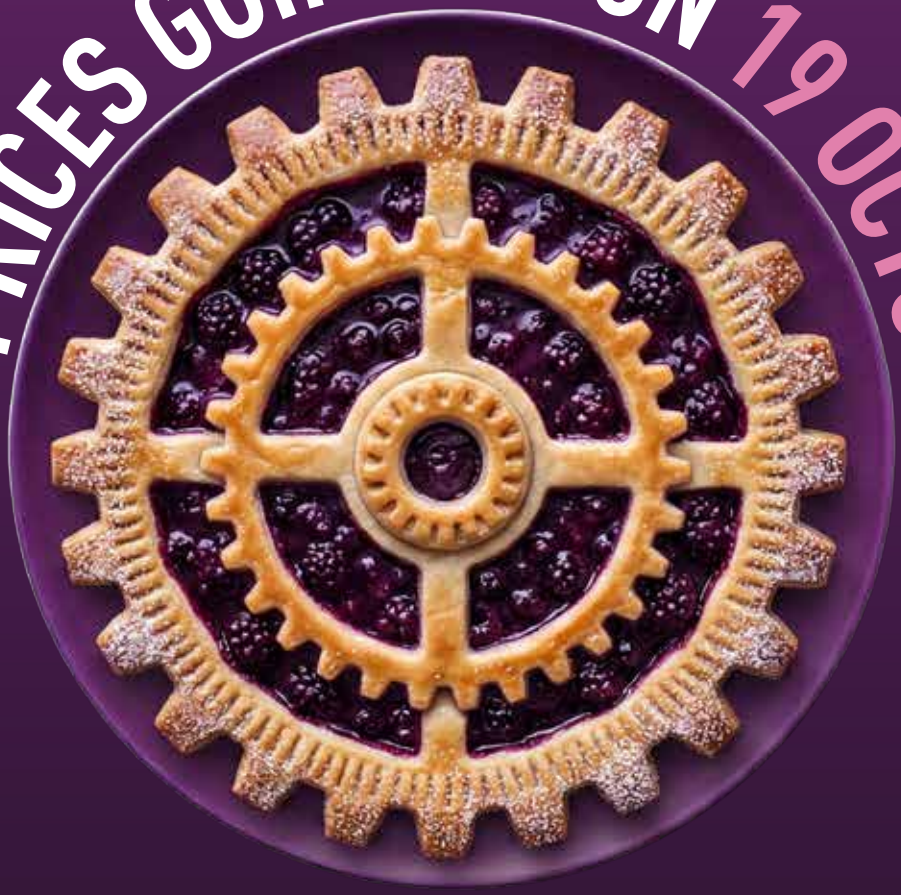

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Europe's dairy industry under pressure

Between market opportunities and regulation



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Less bureaucracy, greater competitiveness – that is the promise coming from Brussels. Yet many European dairy processors face a very different reality. Geopolitical crises, high costs and intense international competition are putting considerable pressure on businesses. At the same time, they must comply with new regulatory requirements, tying up resources that could otherwise be used for investment and innovation. How serious is the European Commission about strengthening Europe's competitiveness?

The consequences of the conflict in the Middle East have once again highlighted the vulnerability of international supply chains and energy markets. For the energy-intensive dairy processing industry, such uncertainties represent an additional challenge. Reliable framework conditions and sufficient room for investment are therefore more important than ever.

This is where the contradictions in European economic policy become apparent. While the European Commission is pursuing its agenda of simplification and reducing administrative burdens, companies must simultaneously adapt to new regulatory requirements. The EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation is one example. Its environmental objectives are understandable, and harmonised rules can strengthen the single market. Nevertheless, compliance requires investment and ties up valuable resources. What matters now is whether the promised reduction in bureaucracy will translate into tangible relief for businesses.

Article 148 of the Common Market Organisation is another example of Brussels' approach to regulation. The new provisions generally require written milk supply contracts, although exceptions apply. Whether these measures will actually contribute to more stable markets remains questionable. After all, market problems cannot simply be regulated away.

Europe's dairy industry benefits from advanced technologies, high quality standards and products that are in demand worldwide. Maintaining these strengths requires investment, innovation and entrepreneurial freedom. Brussels must create the right conditions for businesses to succeed. Europe's dairy processors must compete in global markets – they can ill afford additional bureaucratic hurdles

thinks

Anja Hoffrichter

PEOPLE

Prinova

Prinova has announced the appointment of **BRENT LAFFEY** as its new President, North America effective January 1, 2027. Laffey will lead both Prinova's Distribution and Value-Added businesses in North America.



(photo: Prinova)

European Dairy Association

The European Dairy Association (EDA) elected **KOERT VERKERK** as its new President at its Annual Convention in Bratislava on 16 October 2026. He succeeds Albert de Groot. Verkerk is Corporate Director Public Affairs at Friesland-Campina and serves on the boards of the Dutch Dairy Association (NZO) and the Global Dairy Platform (GDP).

NEWS

Döhler expands global colour production capacities

Investments in Türkiye and Mexico

Döhler is expanding its global colour production network with investments in Türkiye and Mexico. The expansion aims to increase production capacity, introduce new processing technologies and strengthen regional manufacturing capabilities.

At its Karaman site in Türkiye, Döhler is increasing production capacities for black carrot and beetroot-based colour solutions, as well as liquid colours based on anthocyanins and betanins. New spray drying technology will expand colour powder production, while additional equipment for micronisation, roasting and suspension production will broaden the range of available colour formats. The expansion is scheduled for completion by the end of 2026.

In Mexico, Döhler is further developing its production site in the State of Mexico, which opened in July 2026. Plans include dedicated facilities for natural colour production to serve customers across Latin America and North America. The regional expansion is intended to shorten delivery times, improve logistics and support local raw material sourcing.



(photo: Döhler)

Döhler is expanding its global colour production network

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Taste remains at the heart of dairy

Why flavor remains central to dairy innovation



Author:
Jess Ryall, Content and Marketing Executive at FMCG Gurus



(photo: AI generated)

Consumers are taking a more considered approach to the food and drink they purchase, looking for products that align with areas such as health, nutrition, and convenience. However, these priorities do not mean consumers are willing to compromise on enjoyment. Within dairy, taste remains fundamental to product appeal and can ultimately determine whether consumers return to a product.

FMCG Gurus' consumer insights show that 86% of global consumers consider taste important when choosing yogurt, while 87% say the same when purchasing ice cream. This highlights the importance of ensuring that innovation delivers an enjoyable experience alongside other benefits.

Flavor can support everyday enjoyment

Dairy products are consumed across a wide variety of occasions, from breakfast and snacking to desserts and moments of indulgence. Flavor can help brands strengthen these occasions by providing consumers with variety while keeping products familiar and accessible. This is reflected in the yogurt category, where 63% of global yogurt consumers report consuming flavored yogurt. For brands, flavor innovation can therefore be used to refresh established categories and encourage greater engagement without requiring consumers to move too far outside their comfort zones.

Familiar flavors still have strong appeal

Innovation does not always have to mean introducing unusual or unfamiliar flavor combinations. Recognizable flavors can continue to resonate strongly with consumers, particularly when they are associated with enjoyment and indulgence. For example, FMCG Gurus' research reveals that 80% of global consumers who purchase sweetened condensed milk would like chocolate, caramel, or vanilla flavors to be available. This demonstrates how established flavors can still provide opportunities for innovation. Brands can explore new ways of presenting familiar favorites through different textures, formats, and combinations, helping create a sense of novelty while retaining recognizable flavor profiles.

Dairy alternatives must overcome sensory barriers

Taste is particularly important within dairy alternatives, where sensory concerns can prevent consumers from engaging with the category. While consumers may be attracted to alternatives for a variety of reasons, the overall eating and drinking experience must still meet expectations. Half of global consumers who avoid alternative dairy products say a lack of taste is a reason for doing so, while 29% point to insufficient flavor variety. Texture is another important consideration, with 45% identifying it as a barrier. This demonstrates that brands must look beyond positioning alone and ensure products deliver across taste, flavor, and texture.

Balancing innovation with consumer expectations

Looking ahead, flavor will remain an important area of opportunity for dairy brands. However, successful innovation should not simply focus on creating something new. It should reflect how consumers interact with different dairy categories and the sensory experiences they expect from them.

Brands should look to balance familiarity with discovery, while ensuring that nutritional or functional benefits do not overshadow enjoyment. Whether through refreshing established favorites, expanding flavor choice, or addressing sensory barriers in dairy alternatives, delivering on taste will remain essential to creating dairy products that resonate with consumers.

This article is based on FMCG Gurus' 2025 Global Dairy survey.

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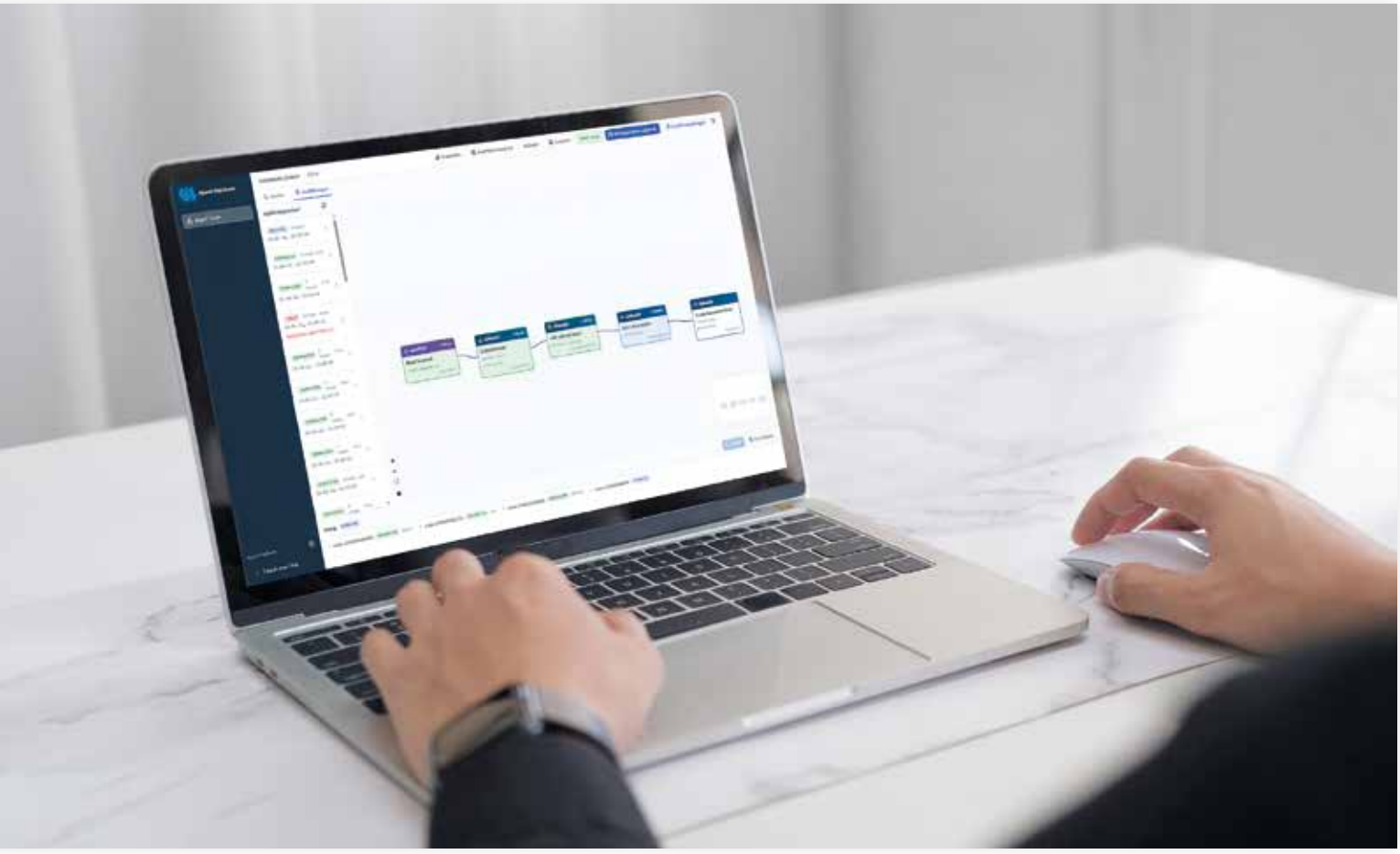

(photo: CSB)

CSB-System

New AI functions to automate business processes

Meeting rising demands, managing increasing process complexity, and handling growing data volumes despite limited staff availability have become a major challenge for many companies in the process industries. With its new CSB Agent Platform, CSB provides the solution to address this challenge: individual AI agents (agent flows) automate repetitive, routine tasks along operational processes and free up skilled staff for more productive work. Whether order entry, document processing, or providing relevant data to downstream processes – incoming information is automatically processed, reconciled with ERP data, and prepared for further processing. One example is automated order entry. The system automatically extracts data from incoming emails, converts the content of PDFs, Excel files, or voice messages into structured data, and prepares the order for checking. This significantly reduces manual work, prevents errors, and accelerates the process.

Intelligent agent flows

The CSB Agent Platform securely embeds intelligent agent flows in CSB's ERP system using controlled interfaces. Running in the customer's own infrastructure, it allows revision and approval of automated results. Users in the departments can configure new AI-assisted workflows without programming knowledge.

At the same time, the human-in-the-loop approach ensures that automated results can be checked and approved before further processing. CSB also takes a comprehensive approach to data security. As the Agent Platform is operated within the customer's own infrastructure, business data remains in a protected environment. At no point is it used to train AI models.

Comprehensive AI strategy

The introduction of the CSB Agent Platform is part of CSB's comprehensive AI strategy. Earlier this year, CSB-System launched "Cesy", its AI assistant for ERP evaluations and contextual knowledge search. "Artificial intelligence is not a separate product in our portfolio, but a strategic part of it.

„This means we are investing in AI skills and developing solutions that create tangible value for our customers. With Cesy, we have simplified information access. With our Agent Platform, we are now automating entire business processes. Step by step, we are making artificial intelligence an integral part of our customers' value chain," says Vanessa Kröner, CEO of CSB-System SE. The necessary infrastructure is already in place: CSB recently started operating an AI server in its in-house data center to provide the agent flows with maximum inference performance while maintaining full data sovereignty – independently of external cloud providers.

NEWS

FAM STUMABO

Third production facility and new equipment strengthen production capacity

FAM STUMABO has expanded its manufacturing operations with the addition of a third production facility, now fully operational. The new facility houses STUMABO's expanded hydrocutting blade operations, with the investment nearly doubling the company's production capacity for French fry blades.

The expansion also includes investments in automated and semi-automated equipment, combining high-volume production capacity with greater flexibility to manufacture specialised blade designs. A new laser system, state-of-the-art forming machines and other equipment further enhance STUMABO's manufacturing capabilities.

"Throughout our history, we have grown alongside the food processing industry, adapting our expertise and technologies to the changing needs of our customers," says Mark Van Hemelrijk, CEO of FAM STUMABO. "This latest expansion represents another important milestone."

STUMABO's expertise in precision blade manufacturing dates back to 1947. Its development has closely followed the evolution of industrial food production, from canning to frozen foods and today's increasingly diverse cutting applications. Since joining forces with FAM in 1997, the Belgian company has combined its blade manufacturing expertise with FAM's knowledge of industrial cutting equipment, serving food processors worldwide.



Mark Van Hemelrijk, CEO of FAM STUMABO
(photos: FAM STUMABO)

The new production facility



PEOPLE

FONTERRA announces CFO resignation

Fonterra Co-operative Group Ltd advises that Chief Financial Officer **ANDREW MURRAY** has resigned to take up a role outside Fonterra. He joined the Co-op as Commercial Director of Fonterra's Global Markets business in 2023, before becoming Fonterra's Chief Financial Officer in 2024. Murray will remain with Fonterra until the end of the calendar year, supporting a smooth transition. Recruitment for Fonterra's next Chief Financial Officer will begin immediately.

Cutting with precision

Cutting technology for a wide range of requirements



(photo: holac)

The requirements for cutting technology in cheese processing are diverse. Different product characteristics, cutting shapes and throughput capacities must be taken into account, along with the increasing automation of production processes. At its Nattheim site in Germany, holac Maschinenbau develops and manufactures cutting technology for the food industry, including solutions for producing cubes, sticks, slices and shredded cheese. The company employs more than 130 people and exports around 80 percent of its machines. Cheese and plant-based products represent one of holac's smaller business segments, but remain an important field of application for the company. Internationally, holac works with distributors, while service operations in Germany are handled from Nattheim and northern Germany.



Not every component is manufactured in-house. Electronic components and certain other parts are sourced from external suppliers. For other components, however, the company relies on development and manufacturing at its Nattheim facility. holac has also created opportunities for future expansion. An additional plot of land has been acquired behind the company's headquarters. Plans for a new building have already been drawn up, although a construction start date has yet to be confirmed.

From cheese blocks to precisely defined cuts

Applications in the cheese industry range from shredded cheese and cheese slices for further processing to cubes and sticks for snack products. Demand for different packaging sizes also continues to evolve. For example, a current trend in shredded cheese is towards 600 g bags. In addition to throughput, the appearance of the cut product plays an important role. Clearly



"When it comes to cheese, cutting performance alone is not enough. Customers and consumers also expect clean cuts with clearly defined, precise edges," explains Ulrich Fetzer, Head of New Development at holac (photo: IDM)



View inside the newly designed production hall (photo: IDM)

defined edges are particularly important for cheese cubes and strips. Achieving the desired result therefore depends on the interaction between the product, the cutting tools and the selected process parameters. "When it comes to cheese, cutting performance alone is not enough. Customers and consumers also expect clean cuts with clearly defined, precise edges," explains Ulrich Fetzer, Head of New Development at holac.

Testing with the actual product

The suitability of a particular cutting solution depends largely on the product being processed. For this purpose, holac operates a technical centre in Nattheim where customers can carry out cutting trials, among other activities. Factory acceptance tests are also conducted there. New processing steps can initially be tested before being implemented either at the technical centre or at the customer's production facility.

This capability is particularly important for cheese, as different varieties have different properties and therefore behave differently during cutting. As a result, both throughput and cutting quality depend on the specific product and the desired cutting shape.

holac offers machines covering a wide range of processing capacities. For smaller volumes, the Cheesixx is one available option. This manually operated cheese cutter can be equipped with different tools to produce various cutting shapes. It can also be used to produce cheese strips and customised special shapes.

Higher throughput for industrial applications

For higher throughput requirements, holac offers the Cheesmaxx 200. When shredding cheese, the machine achieves a throughput of approximately 2.5 to 3 tonnes per hour, depending on the type of cheese. Loading can be carried out via a conveyor belt, allowing several cheese blocks to be fed into the machine.

In larger installations, integrating the cutting machine into the overall production line is becoming increasingly important. The machine can be controlled by the production line and thus incorporated into the overall process.

Machine condition monitoring is another important aspect. On larger machines, it is possible to identify when blades or tools are approaching their wear limits and when maintenance may be required. "For large-scale installations, the trend is clearly towards full integration into the production line. The machine becomes part of the overall process and increasingly provides process and condition data as well," says Fetzer.

Cutting tools and existing equipment

Despite increasing digitalisation, the cutting operation itself remains a mechanical process. The tools used are therefore of particular importance. Some of the cutting tools are manufactured directly in Nattheim. These include cutting grids for different cube sizes, while the blades are produced by external suppliers. In addition to supplying new machines, holac also modifies and upgrades existing equipment to meet changing requirements. This makes it possible, for example, to accommodate new products or cutting shapes without having to replace the existing cutting equipment entirely.

Portioning to specification

In addition to producing cubes, strips and shredded cheese, holac's portfolio includes cutting products into precisely defined portions. One example is a slicing machine from the Sectomat series. A machine of this type has been supplied to a dairy in Austria. Cutting dimensions can be specified, and the sliced products can be grouped. Precise portioning by weight is also possible.

This places greater emphasis not only on achieving a defined cutting result but also on accurate portioning. Reproducible portion sizes are particularly important when the cut cheese portions are subsequently packaged into predetermined retail units.

NEWS

IFF report identifies four life stages

Consumer needs shape dairy product development

IFF has published a new report, Dear Dairy: The Life Stages Guide, examining how consumer expectations of dairy products change throughout life. Based on insights from the company's Panoptic trend and foresight platform, the report identifies four life stages with different nutritional priorities, taste preferences and consumption habits. The first stage, Taste of Nourishment, focuses on childhood, when taste, texture and nutritional value are particularly important. Product development may involve reducing sugar content while maintaining a creamy texture and familiar flavours. During adolescence and young adulthood, Taste of Growth, consumers increasingly select dairy products according to their lifestyles and individual preferences. Protein content, energy and gut health are among the relevant factors.

The third stage, Taste of Balance, reflects the growing importance of convenience and functional benefits in everyday nutrition. Products combining nutritional value with ease of preparation and consumption are a particular focus. In the fourth stage, Taste of Comfort, the emphasis shifts towards healthy ageing, with nutritional requirements relating to vitality, mobility and quality of life. The report also presents product concepts developed for these different stages. Examples include Yogipop, a reduced-sugar strawberry yoghurt designed to retain its creamy texture, and Sunrise Protein, a high-protein beverage formulated to reduce bitterness. Other concepts include Strawbana, a protein-rich powdered smoothie, and a ready-to-drink high-protein vanilla shake.

IFF uses flavour development, dairy cultures, probiotics, fermentation technologies and formulation expertise to develop such concepts. According to the company, the findings are intended to support manufacturers in adapting dairy products to changing consumer requirements throughout different stages of life.

(photo: IFF)



Processed cheese in stick packs

Six-lane stick pack production



Stick packs are an alternative packaging format for processed cheese and other pasty dairy products. Compared with conventional formats such as triangular portions, square packs, blocks or tubs, they require a different forming, filling and sealing process. The Saudi Arabian food manufacturer Wardat Al Mashreq Food Co. has introduced this packaging format for processed cheese and cream products, using an S600 stick pack machine from IMA Hassia. According to the machine manufacturer, stick packs can reduce packaging material requirements by up to 50 percent compared with conventional processed cheese packaging formats. The actual savings depend on the packaging format and material structure. The filled stick packs can also be grouped in cartons for retail distribution.

Six lanes for up to 18,000 stick packs per hour

The S600 installed at Wardat Al Mashreq is designed to fill processed cheese and cream products into stick packs with volumes of 25 and 50 ml. The machine operates with six lanes and achieves a stated output of between 14,400 and 18,000 stick packs per hour. The packaging process begins with flat film being fed into the machine. Cutting tools notch the film into strips

Salem Almazroo, Chairman
Wardat Al Mashreq Food Co.

down to the sealing layer. A specially designed forming shoulder then shapes the material into individual stick packs, which are sealed on three sides. The packs are subsequently filled with processed cheese using product-specific dosing equipment. For this application, the customer specified packaging with a paper-like tactile finish while maintaining food safety requirements. The packaging was also required to support a shelf life of up to twelve months.

Packaging requirements for processed cheese

The stick pack format is intended for individual portions that can be consumed in different settings, including hotels, cafés, offices, fast-food outlets and during travel. For Wardat Al Mashreq, the introduction of the format represents an extension of its existing processed cheese packaging options. The company selected the S600 to provide the required production capacity for the new application. Wardat Al Mashreq has also ordered a second stick pack machine from IMA Hassia. According to the company, delivery is scheduled for the first quarter of 2027. The additional machine is intended to increase production capacity for products packaged in stick packs.

Filling and packaging technology for dairy products

IMA Hassia, part of IMA Dairy & Food, develops and manufactures forming, filling and sealing equipment for liquid and pasty products. Its portfolio includes form-fill-seal (FFS) machines for cups, filling and sealing (FS) machines for preformed cups, and vertical form-fill-seal machines for stick packs and sachets. The range also includes aseptic packaging equipment for applications requiring extended shelf life. The company employs more than 220 people. IMA Dairy & Food operates five production sites in Europe and employs more than 550 people worldwide. The Wardat Al Mashreq installation illustrates the use of multi-lane stick pack technology for processed cheese, combining film forming, sealing and product-specific dosing in a single packaging process.



IMA Hassia stick pack machine S600 on site in Saudi Arabia (photos: IMA Hassia)

Keeping the entire production line in focus

Plant engineering for cheese production



A new assembly hall covering approximately 3,500 m² is scheduled to become operational in early 2027



Robert Zoßeder, Sales Manager Cutting and Packaging at ALPMA

"Mozzarella and white cheese are now also experiencing growth in markets where they previously played only a minor role. This is clearly reflected in our current plant engineering projects," says Stefan Kohler, Sales Manager Cheese Technology (photos: ALPMA)



The requirements for equipment used in cheese production and processing are becoming increasingly diverse. Alongside performance and product quality, flexibility, hygiene and automation play an important role. At ALPMA Alpenland Maschinenbau in Rott am Inn, Germany, solutions are developed for the entire cheese production value chain – from process engineering and cheese making to cutting, portioning and packaging technology.

The ALPMA Group employs around 1,000 people, approximately 700 of whom work at its Rott am Inn site. The workforce also includes a total of 74 apprentices. All business divisions are closely integrated at the site, and the company has a particularly high level of in-house manufacturing, especially in component production.

Solutions tailored to each process

At ALPMA, production line planning does not begin with a machine, but with the customer's specific product. The company primarily develops complete production lines tailored to individual requirements. Through direct dialogue with customers, the products, production processes, required capacities and other specifications are examined together. Based on this information, ALPMA's experts develop the technical solution best suited to the respective process. Robert Zoßeder, Sales Manager at ALPMA, describes the approach: "The starting point is the customer's requirements. Through direct dialogue, we gain an understanding of what the process needs to achieve – and use this as the basis for developing the right production line solution."

A cheese portioning line currently being built for a customer in Chile illustrates how this approach works in practice. A robot removes cheese blocks (Euroblocks and 3 kg cheese loaves) from plastic crates and transfers them to a film removal machine. Operating on two lanes, the machine can unwrap a total of ten cheese loaves per minute. Euroblocks can also be processed on the line. This format flexibility allows the customer to process different products on the same line and adapt production quickly and flexibly to changing requirements.

Particular attention is also paid to hygiene and short changeover times. Product-contact parts can be removed without tools. The machine is operated via a touchscreen panel that supports multiple languages and works in conjunction with an RFID chip. The chip enables the user interface to be tailored to the individual operator. In the subsequent processing stages, the cheese block is divided into bars before being transferred to the slicer. Before delivery, the processes and operating parameters are tested at the company's site. Final fine-tuning and operator training are carried out at the customer's facility using larger quantities of product.

From Feta to hard cheese

The wide range of applications is also reflected in ALPMA's cheese technology division. For example, the company is currently building a Feta cheese production line for a customer in Greece. The cheese is removed from block moulds, grouped, dry-salted and subsequently matured in brine. Other ongoing projects involve the dry salting of soft cheese and the production of brined cheese.

Unlike more compact cutting and packaging lines, large-scale cheese making installations cannot be fully tested under actual production conditions at the Rott am Inn site. The processes

are therefore simulated, and the equipment undergoes acceptance testing against defined performance specifications before delivery.

At the same time, the demands placed on industrial cheese-making plants are increasing. Changing consumer habits, new product trends, and the expansion into additional markets are influencing demand and requiring flexible, high-performance plant designs. At the same time, international markets are changing. According to the company, mozzarella and white cheese are becoming increasingly important in regions where these products were previously less common. This trend is already reflected in current projects.

More space for complex systems

As market requirements change, so do the demands on system planning and assembly. Systems are becoming increasingly complex; individual process steps must mesh precisely, and numerous components must be optimally coordinated. This also places new demands on assembly conditions. To meet these demands and create additional assembly capacity, ALPMA is investing in a new, approximately 3,500 m² assembly hall for cheese technology, which is scheduled to open in early 2027. With a height of 12.5 m, it is designed to accommodate the assembly of even large systems and components.

"With the new assembly hall, we are creating the conditions necessary to assemble increasingly complex systems under optimal conditions. We can coordinate the individual components and process steps within a continuous assembly process and verify their interaction even before delivery," explains Dr. Johannes Stock, Head of Operations.

Six crane systems are being installed for the handling of components; each crane can lift loads of up to ten metric tons. Robots can be anchored directly into the hall floor. About 30 employees are expected to work in the new assembly hall in the future. The design also took into account thermal insulation, room acoustics, and natural ventilation. Stock: "The new assembly hall is not just an investment in additional production area. It is a clear commitment to Germany as a business location."

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Paper-based wrapping for ice cream

Tetra Pak develops new packaging material



Tetra Pak is expanding its portfolio of paper-based packaging materials with a new wrapping solution for ice cream products (photo: Tetra Pak)

Tetra Pak is expanding its portfolio of paper-based packaging materials with a new wrapping solution for ice cream products. The Tetra Pak Ice Cream Wrap consists of up to 85% paper and is designed to meet the requirements of ice cream production, packaging and distribution. The company plans to introduce the material in stages, starting in Europe in the fourth quarter of 2026. The development comes as packaging materials for frozen products face requirements relating to product protection, material consumption and processing performance. According to consumer research cited by Tetra Pak, 24% of consumers worldwide consider sustainability an important aspect of ice cream packaging, while 16% prefer paper-based packaging for this product category.

Multi-layer material structure

The Ice Cream Wrap contains up to 85% paper sourced from FSC-certified forests and other controlled sources. The material has a thin profile and a multi-layer structure designed to provide the functional properties required for ice cream packaging. According to Tetra Pak, the material structure is intended to protect the packaged product while limiting material consumption and supporting reliable processing on packaging equipment. The wrap is also designed for use throughout the cold chain.

Validation under production conditions

The new wrapping material is currently undergoing validation with ice cream manufacturers in Europe. One of the companies involved is the Swedish ice cream producer Triumf Glass. The trials are intended to assess the material's performance under actual production conditions and gather consumer feedback before wider commercialisation. The validation phase is also intended to provide information on how the packaging performs in industrial ice cream production. Specific machine speeds, processing parameters and test results have not yet been disclosed.

Tetra Pak plans to introduce the Ice Cream Wrap through a phased market rollout beginning in the fourth quarter of 2026. Europe will be the first market, with further regions expected to follow. The new material adds a paper-based option to the packaging formats available for ice cream products. Its suitability for different applications will depend on the results of the ongoing validation trials and the requirements of the respective production and packaging processes.

From mozzarella to grated cheese

Material structures and barrier requirements for cheese packaging

Rising cheese consumption, a growing variety of product formats and new regulatory requirements are influencing packaging development. Packaging needs to protect cheese while meeting requirements for material efficiency, processability and recyclability. For manufacturers and packers, this makes it increasingly important to consider the entire system, including the product, packaging, machinery, logistics, retail and consumer use.

The EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) is placing greater emphasis on design for recycling, reduced material use and the assessment of packaging against binding criteria. At the same time, packaging optimisation must not compromise shelf life, food safety or process stability. SÜDPACK's dairy portfolio includes packaging solutions for cuts of cheese, sliced and grated cheese, mozzarella and other speciality cheeses.

photo: SÜDPACK



Three development trends in cheese packaging

In the coming years, packaging development is likely to focus primarily on three areas: thinner material structures with the required performance characteristics, recyclable mono-material concepts and barrier properties tailored more closely to the specific cheese product. Further developments include sealing materials, packaging formats and energy-efficient processing.

Requirements vary depending on the type of cheese and packaging format. Packaging must control oxygen and moisture ingress, preserve flavour and freshness, support ripening where required and run reliably on existing packaging machines. Maximum barrier performance is not always desirable: products that release gases, for example, may require a defined level of gas exchange.

Mono-materials as a development pathway

SÜDPACK sees mono-materials based on polyethylene (PE) and polypropylene (PP) as one approach to packaging designed for recycling, as material loops for both polymers already exist in many EU countries. These materials can be used for different cheese applications, ranging from pouches and flow packs to thermoformed packaging for sliced cheese.

Existing packaging systems can also be optimised. Reduced film thicknesses, optimised pack formats or reclose systems can offer sustainability benefits compared with laminate structures or packaging without a reclose system. Material selection and film structure need to be considered in conjunction with sealing performance, mechanical strength and machinability. For cheese snacks, mozzarella, grated cheese and cuts of cheese, SÜDPACK offers PP- and PE-based flow packs from its CarbonLite® product family. Depending on the application, these can be equipped with appropriate gas and water vapour barriers. Technical requirements vary according to the product: cuts of cheese may require controlled gas exchange, while mozzarella places particular demands on sealability in the presence of brine, as well as puncture resistance and leak tightness. For zipper pouches used for grated cheese, sealing the zipper at high cycle speeds places additional demands on the material. SÜDPACK uses PE structures for applications of this kind. According to the company, these can often be processed more consistently and easily on existing machinery than PP materials.

Coextrusion for mono-material concepts

SÜDPACK uses coextrusion to combine different functional layers. This allows properties such as barrier performance, mechanical stability, sealability and machinability to be adapted to the respective application and packaging concepts to be designed for the product, process and existing packaging machinery. New developments can be tested at industrial scale on the company's multiXtrusion pilot line before being transferred to in-house production following successful testing. This allows new material structures to be evaluated under production-related conditions before their introduction into regular production.

Reclose systems against food waste

Thermoformed packaging is widely used for sliced cheese. A reclose system allows the package to be closed again after slices have been removed, helping to protect the remaining cheese from drying out rapidly and from premature spoilage after the package has first been opened. The Multipeel Pure PP top web can be combined with a mono-PP rigid film to create a PP-based packaging concept that can be assigned to existing recycling streams. Alternatively, Multipeel can be sealed to mono-APET trays. According to SÜDPACK, its material composition allows the top web to be separated from the APET bottom web during the recycling process, enabling the APET to be directed to the corresponding recycling stream as a pure-grade material.

Development and implementation

Switching to packaging designed for recycling involves practical and economic considerations. These include product protection, any modifications required to existing packaging machinery and the behaviour of new materials during processing. SÜDPACK supports such development and transition projects with materials and application consulting, sample runs and testing, as well as assessments of CO_2 impact and recyclability. According to the company, these activities are intended to facilitate the integration of new packaging concepts into existing production processes.

PEOPLE

SYNLAIT: Leon Fung named new CEO

Synlait Milk Limited (Synlait) has appointed **LEON FUNG** as its Chief Executive Officer. Fung has been Acting CEO since 14 May 2026 and has served as a Synlait Director since June 2024. A seasoned executive in the dairy and nutrition sectors, he brings nearly 30 years of experience across production, operations, CAPEX engineering investments, and market development.

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A stronger focus on packaging technology

sema Systemtechnik continues to expand its packaging technology business



(photo: sema Systemtechnik)

At the end of 2025, sema Systemtechnik moved into its new headquarters in Bünde, Germany. Alongside the relocation and the appointment of a new management team, the company has also sharpened its strategic focus. This development encompasses both its market positioning and its internal processes. Packaging technology is at the heart of the business, while metal technology forms its second division. The company currently employs around 87 people. More than 95 percent of its packaging technology business is generated in the dairy sector.

sema Systemtechnik works both with manufacturers of filling equipment, whose production lines incorporate its packaging technology, and directly with dairies. Europe has so far been its core market. At the same time, the company is active in markets including India and United Arab Emirates. "We have clearly focused our activities on packaging technology. The dairy industry is our most important market, but we also intend to expand our business outside Europe in a targeted way," says managing director Niklas Klein-Avink. The company is currently building a tray former with an integrated packer. In total, around 30 machines leave its facilities each year.



Flexible solutions with a strong customer focus

A Top-Loader currently being assembled illustrates just how individually the company's solutions are designed. sema Systemtechnik handles a wide range of cup formats and shapes, with the specific packaging serving as the starting point for machine design. "Depending on the customer's requirements, we also provide support with packaging development and make recommendations for optimal solutions in terms of machinability, product protection and material consumption. If the customer has already defined the packaging, we develop the appropriate solution on that basis. The gripping process depends heavily on the particular product and format. We therefore design the grippers individually, with the aim of achieving maximum operational reliability," explains managing director Dr.-Ing. Konstantin Beckmann.

For tray formers, flexibility is also a key priority alongside high performance. Optional configurations allow adjustments to be automated, enabling very fast product changeovers. The machine is monitored entirely via the operator terminal. Across the entire product range, the machine configurations are specifically adapted to the requirements of the dairy industry.

Close collaboration in Bünde

The organisation of the new site plays an important role in customer-specific development. The mechanical design department is located directly adjacent to the assembly area, while sales and technical project engineering also work closely together. Even at this early stage, the focus extends beyond the machine itself to questions such as material selection, positioning the production line within the factory and ensuring that the line layout and required machine performance are properly coordinated.

sema Systemtechnik sees itself as a systems partner, supporting customers in designing the appropriate solution from an early stage of a project. Consulting and technical project engineering therefore cover not only individual machines but also their integration into the production environment. The company also provides support and advice on packaging development. The site covers approximately 4,000 m² and consists of a completely renovated existing building supplemented by a newly constructed assembly hall.

"The new building has enabled us to adapt the available space as closely as possible to our requirements," explains Klein-Avink. "It has also allowed us to restructure our internal processes, minimise distances between departments and maximise opportunities for coordination," adds Beckmann. The development of new machines, assemblies and components is a high priority. Initial gripper prototypes, for example, are produced using 3D printing.

A manufacturing facility is located approximately five kilometres away, where key components requiring a high level of in-house expertise and know-how are produced. Components can also be reworked there if required. "By separating manufacturing and assembly between two nearby locations, we have established a dedicated assembly facility here in Bünde. This provides a very clean working environment, which is reflected in the quality of our machines," says Klein-Avink. Following assembly, the machines and systems undergo commissioning and testing in Bünde before final commissioning takes place at the customer's site.

Continuous development of machine technology

sema Systemtechnik continuously develops and improves its machines and product portfolio. In its tray formers, for example, the use of servo technology has been opti-



Dr.-Ing. Konstantin Beckmann and Niklas Klein-Avink form the new management team at sema Systemtechnik (photo: IDM)

mised. Depending on the particular carton blank, even complex trays can be erected at rates of up to 60 cycles per minute. The packaging technology portfolio includes tray formers, Top-Loaders, sleevers, wrap-around packers, assortment packers and conveyor systems.

sema Systemtechnik offers individual and customer-focused solutions in the field of secondary packaging, from erecting trays to gripping and placing primary packaging, as well as grouping and conveying products. Its range extends from standalone machines to complete end-of-line packaging systems.

From individual machines to complete lines

The future development of the packaging technology business will not focus solely on individual machines. The company intends to link the various process stages within end-of-line packaging more closely and further advance automation at the interfaces between them. One key area of focus is optimising overall equipment effectiveness (OEE). The aim is to further improve the efficiency and availability of customers' production systems.

From the company's perspective, this is closely linked to the shortage of skilled workers. When operators need to be trained more quickly, the demands placed on intuitive operation and machine concepts that are as self-explanatory as possible increase. Regulatory changes are also influencing the development of packaging technology. Packaging material consumption must be minimised while maintaining adequate product protection. This, in turn, affects the machinability of the packaging

"This is just one of the reasons why it is so important for us to have in-depth expertise in both packaging and packaging development, as well as in machine technology. This enables us to offer our customers the best possible solutions," explains Beckmann. In the company's view, packaging technology and machine engineering will therefore need to be considered even more closely in conjunction with digitalisation and automation in the future. The objective is to give equal consideration to efficiency, flexibility and ease of operation.

With its new headquarters in Bünde, sema Systemtechnik intends to drive this development forward – from customer-specific project engineering, design, assembly and commissioning of machines and systems through to customer-oriented service throughout the entire machine lifecycle.

EDA Annual Convention 2026

Europe's dairy industry in global competition

Europe's dairy industry faces economic and political challenges. How regional roots, global competitiveness and sustainability can be brought together was the focus of discussions among industry representatives at the European Dairy Association (EDA) Annual Convention in Bratislava from 14 to 16 October 2026.

Regional strength and international competitiveness go hand in hand, stressed newly elected EDA President Koert Verkerk. He highlighted the dairy sector's importance for food security, economic resilience and rural communities. Long-term investment requires value creation both within the single market and through exports. Verkerk called for a reliable policy framework, faster approval procedures for innovations, and fair, open markets. Sustainability must remain economically viable, while high quality standards must not be undermined by costs and bureaucracy.

Despite structural change, Slovakia's dairy industry retains an international presence. Dr Marián Šolty, Slovak Dairy Association, pointed to high-quality products and exports accounting for more than half of production. Investment, less bureaucracy and fair relationships along the value chain are needed. Nutrition issues must be discussed on a scientific basis.

Declining dairy cow numbers, high costs and low-priced imports are putting Slovakia's dairy industry under pressure. Richard Takáč, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic, nevertheless sees considerable potential. He called for fair





The panel discussion with Christoph Till, Piercristiano Brazzale, Osin Morrin, Flavio Coturni highlighted how Europe's dairy industry can combine local roots with global competitiveness

market conditions, planning certainty and investment funding, and criticised possible cuts to the Common Agricultural Policy from 2028.

Trade agreements open up new sales opportunities, but protectionism and trade barriers make market access more difficult. Flavio Coturni, European Commission (DG TRADE), pointed particularly to India and China. The EU aims to open markets, enforce trade rules and protect geographical indications. Quality, innovation and trust, he said, are Europe's strengths.

Strengthening competitiveness in a changing global market

The panel discussion featuring Christoph Till, Meggle SK/CZ/HU, Piercristiano Brazzale, Brazzale, and Oisín Morrin, Tipperary France, highlighted how Europe's dairy industry can combine local roots with global competitiveness. Regional brands, close relationships with farmers and consumers, and the sector's importance for rural areas form the foundation for this. According to the participants, European dairy products remain successful internationally primarily through quality, food safety, traceability, sustainability and trust – pure price competition is hardly feasible. Mercosur, South-East Asia and China offer growth potential, whilst India is regarded more as a future competitor due to its rising production. Calls were made for a reliable political framework, fewer trade barriers within the EU single market and planning certainty regarding agreements. The possible EU enlargement to include Ukraine was seen as an opportunity, provided that the transition and alignment with EU standards are carefully managed. Innovations such as AI, precision farming, genetics and functional foods are expected to improve efficiency, animal health and climate protection.

Despite the war, the Ukrainian dairy industry is investing in quality, animal welfare, technology and energy independence. As Andriy Tabalov of LLC Milk Company Volooshkove Pole explained, milk yields are rising and professional farms are becoming increasingly important. 70 dairies are authorised to export to the EU. The aim is to achieve full alignment with EU legislation by 2028. Tabalov called for partnerships and free trade in milk with the EU. He called for simpler tariff quota procedures by 2027 to reduce costs and bureaucracy.

Innovation and sustainability as drivers of resilience

Food security is also a matter of societal security, stressed Alex Henriksen, Tetra Pak. Attention should focus on the "critical middle" between farm and consumer: processing, packaging, storage and distribution. Efficient, flexible and more climate-friendly processes strengthen resilience. According to Henriksen, food security must therefore be incorporated into Europe's crisis preparedness and policy impact assessments.

Growth and innovation are becoming increasingly important for European dairies. This was the finding of a survey presented by Karl Nilsson and Ludovic Meilhac, McKinsey. At the same time, price volatility, trade conflicts and pressure from retailers are creating uncertainty. Declining cow numbers could constrain milk production, partly offset by higher milk solids content. Opportunities lie in protein products, exports and artificial intelligence.



Richard Takáč, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic, called for fair market conditions, planning certainty and investment funding, and criticised possible cuts to the Common Agricultural Policy from 2028



Dr. Marián Šolty, Slovak Dairy Association

Against the backdrop of climate change, geopolitical tensions and malnutrition, Gilles Froment, International Dairy Federation, called for science-based global standards. Europe should contribute more of its expertise in quality, food safety, animal welfare and sustainability. Dietary guidelines must take account of health, the environment, affordability and security of supply rather than making sweeping judgements about foods or animal proteins.

The role of dairy in nutrition and food security

Assessing the health impact of food requires looking at the whole product, not merely its fat, salt or sugar content. Daniela Martini, University of Milan, emphasised the contribution dairy products make to a balanced diet. What matters is the food matrix and the interaction of its components; assessments must be product-specific and take the overall diet into account.

Miquela Hanselman, National Milk Producers Federation, outlined US nutrition policy under the "Make America Healthy Again" agenda. Among the successes she cited were the renewed permission to serve whole milk and 2% milk in schools and the favourable recognition of full-fat dairy products in new dietary recommendations. Risks remained in sugar limits for flavoured milk and inconsistent definitions of ultra-processed foods.

The convention showed that Europe's dairy industry can build on its regional strengths and international opportunities. To make the most of them, the sector needs reliable rules, innovation and access to open markets.



Newly elected EDA President Koert Verkerk (photos: IDM)

New pilot plant for instant products

Sternchemie expands testing capabilities



With its new fluidised bed agglomerator, Sternchemie has expanded its application and development capabilities for instantizing and lecithin coating (photo: Sternchemie)

With its new fluidised bed agglomerator, Sternchemie has expanded its application and development capabilities for instantizing and lecithin coating. The new pilot system makes it possible to test and optimize customer applications under controlled conditions and to industry standards. This shortens development cycles, tightens product recommendations, and significantly accelerates innovation processes. "With the fluidised bed agglomerator at our Stern-Technology Center in Ahrensburg, we can replicate customer applications under realistic production conditions," says Daniel Kandt, Technical Product Manager Instant at Sternchemie. "This brings us valid results faster, and solutions that are an exact fit. For our customers that means more certainty, higher speed, and at the same time the ability to address new areas of innovation."

Realistic simulations of customer processes

The fluid bed technology is an established industry standard, especially in the milk and instant products category. With this new pilot system Sternchemie can replicate industry conditions in its own laboratory. Powders are fluidised by the flow of air and then treated with special lecithin mixes. This provides intensive surface contact that applies an even layer of lecithin on the particles. Since the process closely replicates real production conditions, the result is a tailored lecithin solution that is directly transferrable to the customer's process.

Fast and efficient development of individual customer solutions

Up until now development often required external help, which could lead to capacity bottlenecks and long lead times. With the new system Sternchemie can react to customer requests much more flexibly and accelerate product development. Moreover, multiple lecithin blends, their dosages and process parameters, can be tested and optimised according to customers' needs. The results provide a sound basis for targeted production solutions and process improvements. This makes it possible to greatly reduce the number of time- and cost-intensive trials on production lines, or even avoid them altogether.

Improved functionality for customer-specific requirements

The instant food properties customers look for are often very application specific. At the same time, factors like solubility, wetting, and foaming vary by product, process, and instantizing method. The new system enables the targeted optimisation of these properties. In parallel, raw material and process influences can be systematically captured and tested, to secure the optimum functionality for the given application in customer use.

A platform for innovation and new applications

With the new system Sternchemie can work on new functional solutions, in addition to projects for customers. "Thanks to the system we can work more on issues like foam control, functional improvement, and alternative raw materials. This expands our technological expertise and at the same time creates the basis for future product innovation," notes Kandt.

The integration of the fluidised bed agglomerator in the Stern-Technology Center in Ahrensburg near Hamburg also opens up new possibilities for group-wide developments and customer solutions within the Stern-Wywiol Gruppe. The application of surface-active liquids to powdery products can positively affect a range of properties, including stability, processability, and digestibility.

NEWS

Dairy seasoning blends for food applications

Dairy-based and alternative formulations

Bluegrass Ingredients offers dairy seasoning blends for a range of food applications, including snacks, baked goods, dips, dressings and prepared meals. The formulations combine dairy ingredients with spices and other components to produce different flavour profiles, ranging from BBQ and sour cream & onion to spicy nacho and creamy dill. For snack production, the company develops cheese seasoning blends suitable for both extruded products and topical application. Nacho cheese powders, for example, are formulated to provide specific colour, texture and flavour characteristics.

The portfolio also includes clean-label, non-dairy, vegan and alternative dairy formulations. Blends can be adapted to individual product requirements, including flavour profiles, texture and cost considerations. Bluegrass Ingredients also develops customised dairy and spice combinations in cooperation with food manufacturers. Beyond snack applications, the seasoning blends can be used in bread, crackers, other baked goods, dips, dressings and prepared meals. The company also develops formulations for sauces, taking into account the respective processing and product requirements.



Anuga FoodTec 2027

Dairy technology between high-protein and plant-based

Exhibitors present solutions for the manufacture of protein concentrates, special ingredients and plant-based beverages. Protein-rich milk products, ingredients for baby food and plant-based alternatives pose a variety of challenges for industrial processing. Proteins must be concentrated, mineral content regulated and textures stabilised. Anuga FoodTec will show which technologies are available for this and how product quality can be combined with efficient resource deployment from 23 to 26 February 2027. The dairy market is evolving. Alongside nutritional value, additional health functions as well as quality of ingredients are becoming more important. "Our research shows that 31 percent of consumers value how well the body absorbs or uses protein when choosing F&B to get protein. For product development, this means it is no longer just about achieving the highest possible protein content," says Ekaterina Tretyakova, Market Insights Consultant at Innova Market Insights. The expert from the Knowledge Partner of Anuga FoodTec will examine the development of classic dairy products and plant-based alternatives on February 23 on the Innovation Stage in her presentation "Dairy Evolved: The Convergence of Dairy and Alternatives".

Ultrafiltration plays a key role. To this purpose, the plant manufacturer Alpma offers systems for the manufacture of milk protein (MPC) and whey protein concentrate (WPC). The Belgian dairy company Solarec combines ultra-filtration with reverse osmosis to extract MPCs. The Mozzarella cheesery realised by Alpma also has integrated whey preparation. An RO-HighTS system thereby enables high dry matter content. In 2025, Solarec supplemented production with another ultra-filtration system for the manufacture of WPC 80. An overarching energy concept enables the supply of hot water, ice water and electricity, entirely without steam.

Efficiently processing proteins

"Modern dairy products require the coordinated interaction of technologies along the entire process chain, from protein concentration to subsequent processing. Energy-efficiency is thereby a central criterion. This ambition is reflected in the offering of the exhibitors", says Roland Thiemann, Director of Anuga FoodTec. The subsequent processing of milk and whey proteins is also the theme of the fifth



international conference on "Separation and Drying Technologies for Milk, Whey and Vegan Sources", which will take place on 22 and 23 February on the Cologne fair grounds.

Refining whey through electrodialysis

Baby food has especially high requirements for the purity and composition of milk ingredients. In addition to microbiological safety, decisive is a precisely coordinated ratio of proteins and minerals. Whey powder serves to set the ratio of whey proteins in the recipe. In order that an excessive amount of dissolved salts is not simultaneously incorporated, the whey must be correspondingly demineralised. In the case of the quality D90, 90 percent of the minerals originally contained are removed.

The sophistication of industrial realisation is made clear by a production line, which GEA has realised with the Chinese dairy corporation Yili. The heart of the system is electrodialysis. Under the influence of an electric field, dissolved mineral ions wander through ion-selective membranes and are removed from the product flow. GEA has combined this technology with upstream separation and concentration and subsequent drying. According to the information provided by the company, this is the first completely integrated D90 production line with electrodialysis in China.

From milk to plant-based alternatives

The technology offering of Anuga FoodTec extends from membrane filtration and electrodialysis through centrifuge technology, homogenisation and fermentation to spray drying and hygienic filling. More than 170 exhibitors are currently listed in the dairy technology product group including ice cream manufacturing. The confirmed field of participants includes, besides Alpma, GEA and Flottweg, further providers like Andritz, Krones, Omnia Technologies, Elecster, Tecnal and Kieselmann. "With this variety of technical solutions, trade visitors require orientation above all else. Which technologies have proven themselves under real production conditions? What are their limits and what prerequisites must companies check prior to investment? We give these questions space in the specialised programme", says Carola K. Herbst, Deputy Managing Director of the DLG Competence Center Agriculture and Food. One example of this is the guided tour "Milk and alternatives reconsidered - variety, innovation and sustainable processing" on 23 February. It leads to selected exhibitors and links classic dairy technology with the technological challenges of manufacturing plant-based alternatives.

The oat beverage production of the fruit processor Fidel Dreher in Stockach makes clear how the processing of plant-based raw materials can be realised at an industrial scale. To this purpose, oat raw materials are mixed with water and enzymes, ground in two stages and hydrolysed. The subsequent solids separation removes rough fibres from the suspension, while fine particles remain to provide the desired mouthfeel in the beverage. "Too many solids can impair product stability, while too few can have a negative influence on flavour and consistency", explains Justin Wagner, Sales Manager for plant-based milk alternatives at Flottweg. The separation is conducted by a Z5E decanter from Flottweg. Through the connection of the recipe control to the superordinate process control system, various product variants can be processed for the most part autonomously and with reproducible results. On 26 February, the Innovation Stage picks up this theme under the title "Processing of Plant-Based Food".



Rendering of the planned expansion of GEA's Janesville campus in Wisconsin. The new building will provide additional space for manufacturing, testing, training and application technology (photo: GEA)

GEA expands Janesville facility

Additional manufacturing and application capabilities

GEA is expanding its Janesville campus in Wisconsin, USA, to increase its manufacturing, assembly and technology capabilities for the North American food, beverage and nutrition industries. The project involves an investment of approximately USD 25 million in construction, machinery and equipment. The new building will provide around 70,000 square feet (approximately 6,500 m²) of additional office, manufacturing, research and industrial space.

Following approval of a development agreement with the City of Janesville, construction is expected to begin in autumn 2026. The facility is scheduled for completion by the end of 2027 and is expected to become fully operational in early 2028.

Manufacturing and application technology

The expansion will bring manufacturing, assembly, testing and application-related activities closer together at the Janesville site. A particular focus will be on technologies from GEA's Nutrition Plant Engineering portfolio, including drying technology. The additional infrastructure will also be used for customer and internal training as well as application testing. By locating these activities at the

same site, GEA aims to facilitate the transfer of test results into industrial production processes and reduce the coordination required between development and manufacturing.

"Food and beverage producers in North America are looking for partners who can combine process expertise, practical testing and reliable project execution close to their markets," says Klaus Stojentin, CEO of GEA's Nutrition Plant Engineering Division and member of the GEA Executive Board.

Existing technology infrastructure

The new building will complement facilities already operating at the Janesville campus. In 2024, GEA opened a production, repair, logistics and training facility for equipment including separators, decanters, valves and pumps. This was followed in 2025 by the opening of the New Food Application & Technology Center. The centre provides pilot-scale testing capabilities for precision fermentation, cell cultivation and plant-based applications.

The planned expansion will add further manufacturing and application-related infrastructure to the existing facilities. According to GEA, the objective is to enable customers to move from process testing to production planning with fewer interfaces between different teams and locations.

Expansion of the campus

As part of the project, GEA plans to combine a 13.94-acre parcel of city-owned land with approximately 16 acres already owned by the company. This will create a campus covering nearly 30 acres (approximately 12 hectares). In addition to the USD 25 million investment in the new building and equipment, GEA plans to allocate approximately USD 2 million to measures intended to reduce the site's environmental footprint. Specific measures have not yet been confirmed.

The development agreement with the City of Janesville also includes employment-related provisions. The performance-based incentive framework is linked to the creation of 52 full-time-equivalent positions. According to city representatives, GEA's total investment in Janesville will reach approximately USD 75 million through the successive expansion projects initiated since the first Tax Increment Financing agreement in 2022.

Local production for the North American market

The investment forms part of GEA's strategy to expand local production and technology capabilities in key markets. At Janesville, the company is combining equipment manufacturing and assembly with process development, application testing and training. The additional facilities are intended to support food, beverage and nutrition manufacturers in North America, particularly in projects requiring the coordination of process engineering, testing and industrial implementation. With the new building scheduled to become operational in early 2028, GEA will further expand the range of manufacturing and technology activities available at its Janesville campus.

NEWS

Danone

R&D facility in China

Danone has inaugurated its Shanghai R&D and Innovation Center in Pudong. It covers an area of 5,200 square meters and brings together approximately 130 interdisciplinary professionals, focusing on research across multiple categories including early life nutrition, adult medical nutrition, and drinking water and beverages. The center houses an integrated R&D laboratory, a 900-square-meter microbiome research laboratory, a 300-square-meter science experience and consumer interaction space, and a 700-square-meter pilot plant. The center will not only serve the Chinese and Asia-Pacific markets but also contribute to Danone's global research and innovation agenda.

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Also complete dairy factories

When robots learn to see

RaaS and Spatial AI come to the dairy plant



Author:
Dijam Panigrahi, Co-founder and COO of GridRaster

(photos: GridRaster)





Dairy processors have been trying to solve a staffing problem for years, and it has not gone away. The U.S. dairy industry supports more than 3.2 million jobs and generates $49 billion in direct wages, yet many plants are still running 10% to 20% below capacity because they cannot find enough workers to run every line every shift. That gap is arriving alongside two technologies maturing together: Robotics as a Service (RaaS) and spatial AI. Together they offer dairy processors a path to automation that does not require the capital outlay or rigid engineering that has kept smaller and mid sized plants on the sidelines.

From owning equipment to subscribing to capacity

RaaS shifts robotics from a capital expenditure to an operating expense, letting a plant subscribe to autonomous mobile robots and collaborative arms rather than buy them outright. Dairy processors are already moving in this direction, with conveyors and palletizers built around flexible, modular integration to offset labor shortages and rising SKU complexity, a shift suppliers describe as this equipment becoming the backbone of the modern plant. What spatial AI adds is perception. Instead of a robot following a fixed path painted on the floor, spatial AI uses computer vision and continuous 3D mapping to let a machine interpret a working plant in real time, including wet floors, moving pallet jacks, and staff crossing between packaging lines. That adaptability is what makes a subscribed fleet genuinely useful in a dairy environment, where layouts change with seasonal runs and new SKUs far more often than a rigid automation system can accommodate.

Environments that punish ordinary hardware

Dairy plants present a harder infrastructure test than most factory floors. Frequent washdowns, standing water, temperature swings between processing rooms and cold storage, and condensation around refrigeration units all threaten the sensors, cameras, and wireless signals spatial AI depends on. Real time mapping and object recognition require dependable, low latency connectivity, and a private 5G network or high density Wi Fi is often necessary to keep multiple robots communicating without dropped signals near metal tanks and dense stainless steel equipment. Manufacturers evaluating a RaaS vendor should ask specifically how sensors and network hardware are rated for hygienic washdown conditions and sustained humidity, not just for a typical dry goods warehouse, since a system built for general manufacturing will not automatically hold up on a dairy floor.

People still run the line

Spatial AI's ability to operate safely near people, rather than behind a cage, changes what the job looks like for line workers. Roles shift from manually loading cases or clearing jams to supervising a fleet, watching for exceptions, and stepping in when a robot flags something it cannot resolve on its own. This is a real opportunity in an industry that has struggled for years to fill positions, but it only works if training keeps pace with the equipment. Workers need structured instruction in human robot collaboration, sanitation protocols around the new hardware, and troubleshooting basics, not just a walkthrough on installation day. Plants that build this training in alongside the rollout, rather than after it, see fewer disruptions and safer floors.

Traceability data is also plant data

Continuous spatial mapping generates a detailed digital record of a facility's layout and workflow, on top of the food safety and traceability data dairy plants already manage under FSMA. That telemetry typically leaves the premises to be processed by a third party RaaS vendor, and food manufacturers have become a growing target for exactly this kind of exposure. Industry trackers have found that cyberattacks against the food and beverage sector more than doubled between the first quarter of 2024 and the first quarter of 2025, with production environments increasingly the target rather than office networks. Before signing a RaaS contract, dairy processors should require clear answers on where spatial and operational data is stored, how long it is kept, and whether the vendor's security has been independently verified. A breach in this sector does not just cost data, it can halt a line and threaten product safety records.

Where standardized hardware meets SKU complexity

Modularity is the appeal of RaaS, but modularity has limits, and dairy tests them more than most categories. A single plant might run fluid milk cartons, yogurt cups, cheese blocks, and specialty packaging on the same floor, each with different weights, textures, and handling requirements. A robot fleet designed for broad applicability may not integrate cleanly with a plant's existing manufacturing execution system or handle every format without real engineering work. Processors should press vendors early on API compatibility and pilot new deployments on a single, contained line before expanding across the plant, rather than assuming flexibility on paper will translate to flexibility on a floor built for cheese one week and cottage cheese the next.

Balancing speed with discipline

RaaS and spatial AI offer dairy processors a real answer to a labor shortage that has not eased, and the appeal of avoiding large capital outlays is not going away. But the technology's promise depends on hardware built for washdown conditions, a workforce trained alongside the rollout, data practices that protect proprietary and safety information, and honest expectations about where standardized equipment meets the limits of SKU complexity. Processors that treat these as sequential steps, rather than details to resolve after signing, are the ones most likely to turn a subscription model into lasting capacity.

Fi Europe 2026

Ingredients and innovations in focus

From 17 to 19 November 2026, Fi Europe brings together the international ingredients industry in Frankfurt to showcase the latest innovations and solutions for food and beverage development. Key topics include health and wellness, plant-based alternatives, reformulation and technological innovations. Alongside the conference programme, the New Product Zone and Tasting Bar offer insights into new ingredients, product concepts and emerging trends, including protein and fibre enrichment and functional nutrition. Here you will find a brief overview of some of the innovations presented at this year's trade fair.

ARLA FOODS INGREDIENTS/WHEYCO: New whey-based concepts

Arla Foods Ingredients and wheyco, DMK Group's whey business, exhibit together for the first time following the merger of their parent companies in June. The companies highlight new ingredient applications for dairy products, functional nutrition and protein-rich foods and beverages.

Arla Foods Ingredients showcases new applications for its Targeted GLP-1 Companion Nutrition concept, including spoonable and drinking yogurts, a fermented high-protein shot and a water-based protein shot. The concept focuses on nutrient-dense products designed to meet the nutritional needs of GLP-1 users.

Another focus is the Unlock Permeate concept featuring Variolac, a whey permeate ingredient produced using nanofiltration. According to the company, the ingredient offers a mild milky taste and contains calcium, magnesium and potassium. It is intended to improve sensory properties and cost efficiency in dairy, bakery and confectionery applications. Further concepts include protein shakes, protein waters and the AirBar, an aerated milk protein bar with a light texture.



(photo: Arla Foods Ingredients)

At the neighbouring booth, DMK Industry highlights its fat-filled ingredient ranges TOPPICS, FATTICS and BATTICS, alongside sweetened condensed milk products. Applications include cupcakes with aerated toppings, chocolate caramel cookies, chocolate espresso fudge and Café Bombón, demonstrating different approaches to texture, stability and flavour in food products.

(photo: Hydrosol)



Hydrosol and Planteneers present innovative hybrid and high–protein concepts

HYDROSOL AND PLANTENEERS: Hybrid dairy drinks and high-protein innovations

At Fi Europe, sister companies Hydrosol and Planteneers present new product concepts focusing on hybrid foods, functional beverages, high protein and clean-label solutions. At the Stern-Wywiol Gruppe booth, the companies highlight innovative approaches combining dairy and plant-based ingredients, alongside new developments in the snacking category. A key focus is on hybrid milk-based beverages. Hydrosol and Planteneers introduce a solution that allows manufacturers to partially replace milk protein with plant protein while maintaining a high protein content. The concept enables dairies to develop high-protein drinks with reduced dependence on milk protein availability and costs. According to the companies, the solution also provides a suitable basis for meal replacement beverages, which can be further enhanced with individual micronutrient premixes.

Another highlight is a functional beverage developed in cooperation with sister companies SternVitamin and OlbrichtArom. Addressing the growing interest in mood food and mental wellness, the companies showcase a creamy almond-cinnamon flavoured drink made from lactose-free milk and oats. The beverage provides the same protein content as whole milk and contains natural calcium. A micronutrient premix from SternVitamin adds magnesium and vitamins B1, B6 and B12, which contribute to the normal functioning of the muscles and nervous system. The concept was designed as a relaxing drink for breaks throughout the day.

The companies also present a fermented high-protein beverage combining milk and plant proteins. Developed by Hydrosol, Planteneers and SternVitamin, the plant-enriched drink delivers 20 g of protein per 230 ml serving and is fortified with calcium, magnesium, zinc and vitamins D, B6 and B12. Designed for meals with small portions and high nutritional density, the beverage requires no gelatine and can also be produced in a low-fat version. Its fruity, fresh flavour is intended to provide an enjoyable drinking experience.

Beyond dairy-related applications, Hydrosol and Planteneers showcase several hybrid meat and plant-based snack concepts. These include hybrid cabanossi sausages with a meat reduction of up to 50 %, hybrid meatballs and ready-to-eat kebab balls with an integrated dip. Planteneers also presents its new Culinary Balls, plant-based alternatives to beef jerky and chicken breast fillets, as well as mango bars containing plant protein and no added sugar.

NORDMANN: Plant-based, high-protein and fibre-rich food concepts

Nordmann presents three innovative food concepts at its booth's tasting bar, focusing on current consumer trends such as plant-based and vegan products, high protein, high fibre and low sugar content. The company showcases a creamy vegan spread containing plant-based proteins and prebiotic fibre, a vegan batter and a vegan shake rich in protein and fibre. All three concepts are low in sugars and are designed to combine nutritional benefits with appealing taste and texture. The formulations are developed at Nordmann's newly opened Life Sciences Lab in Hamburg.

Co-exhibitor Ulrick+Short highlights clean-label ingredient solutions aimed at enabling shorter ingredient lists and improved functionality. The company also introduces Fazenda Lieto, a sunflower seed flour combining nutritional value with functional properties, which is featured in various tasting concepts at the booth. Nordmann also highlights its broad ingredient portfolio, covering applications across several food sectors, including dairy, beverages, bakery, confectionery and functional foods.

GNT: Colour solutions

GNT features various application concepts featuring its plant-based EXBERRY colours. Made from non-GMO fruits, vegetables and plants, the colours can be used in a wide range of food and beverage products. The focus includes purple colour concepts reflecting the growing ube trend, as well as colourful bubble teas. GNT also showcases foodservice applications, including milkshakes, soft drinks, burgers, baked goods and snacks. Through these concepts, the company demonstrates the potential applications of plant-based colours across different product categories. The EXBERRY portfolio covers a broad spectrum of shades and is designed for use in various food and beverage applications.

(photo: GNT Group)



Ube is one of the key trends GNT highlights at Fi Europe



PROVA showcases its portfolio of nut flavours and extracts (photo: PROVA)

PROVA: Nut flavours and extracts

PROVA showcases its portfolio of nut flavours and extracts, highlighting solutions designed to help food and beverage manufacturers address raw material shortages, price fluctuations and reformulation challenges. The company presents a range of authentic nut profiles, including pistachio, hazelnut, peanut, coconut and pecan.

The solutions are particularly suitable for plant-based drinks, protein shakes, coffee beverages, desserts and other food applications. PROVA highlights how nut flavours can help mask undesirable off-notes often associated with plant proteins and functional ingredients while enhancing the overall sensory profile. Hazelnut offers flavour profiles ranging from intensely roasted to mild and creamy, while pistachio provides notes from fresh and green to roasted and full-bodied. Pecan delivers maple and caramel-like notes that pair particularly well with vanilla and chocolate.

Another focus is on coconut flavours, which complement vanilla, chocolate and caramel as well as Asian-inspired flavour profiles. In plant-based beverages, coconut can contribute a rich, indulgent taste while helping to soften the astringent and bitter notes of matcha green tea powder. At its "Comptoir Gourmand", PROVA showcases various food and beverage creations demonstrating the application possibilities of its flavour portfolio. The company also highlights PROVASENS, its in-house sensory analysis department, which supports flavour development by analysing sensory profiles and consumer preferences.

PROSUR: Natural ingredient solutions

Prosur presents its natural ingredient solutions, showing how its "Protect Food with Food" approach can help food and beverage manufacturers respond to changing consumer preferences and regulatory requirements. Across Europe, demand for natural and clean-label products continues to grow. At the same time, stricter regulations on additives such as nitrites and nitrates, along with increasing efforts to reduce sugar, are influencing product development in the food and beverage industry. Manufacturers are therefore looking for ingredients that offer both technological functionality and nutritional benefits. In this context, Prosur presents its Get it Natural Toolbox, a range of natural and clean-label solutions designed to help manufacturers reduce or replace certain additives, sugar, artificial sweeteners and salt while maintaining product quality and taste. The portfolio also includes ingredients with additional nutritional properties. For example, Prosur's carob-based sweetener systems contain dietary fibre and naturally occurring polyphenols, offering an approach to sugar reduction that goes beyond sweetness alone.



SALTWELL Group presents its natural salt solution (photo: Pavel Iarunichev)

SALTWELL: Natural salt solutions for sodium reduction

SALTWELL Group presents its natural salt solution designed to help food manufacturers reduce sodium content without compromising taste, functionality or clean-label formulations. SALTWELL contains 35% less sodium than conventional salt while offering comparable sensory properties and functionality. The ingredient is suitable for a wide range of food applications, including dairy products, meat, bakery products, ready meals, soups, sauces and condiments. According to the company, SALTWELL can be used as a 1:1 replacement for conventional salt, enabling manufacturers to develop reduced-sodium products while maintaining familiar taste and texture.

At its booth, SALTWELL Group highlights the ingredient's performance through taste tests, demonstrating how sodium levels can be reduced by up to 40% in certain applications without negatively affecting sensory attributes or shelf life. The company also emphasises that sensory tests have shown flavour improvements in some applications. The company also highlights its newly opened production facility in Santiago, which has significantly increased manufacturing capacity and strengthened its supply chain.

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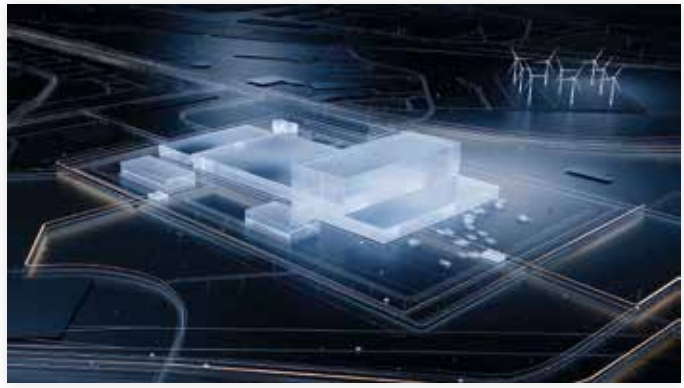

(photo: KHS)

From initial idea to turnkey beverage plant and beyond
TECHNOLOGY



(photo: Alleanza Cooperative)

EU trade deals promise dairy exporters gains
COUNTRY REPORT



(photo: YONTEX/Thomas Geiger)

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