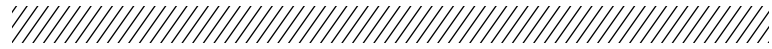


43. Kim's
Chocolates



Green
Chocolate



Making delicious chocolate in a sustainable way? It is possible. Chocolate manufacturer Kim's Chocolates from Tienen was already crowned the Most Energy Aware SME in 2008 but does not shy away from further investments. "We can still progress quite a lot," describes CEO Fons Maex the green benefit objective. "In addition to a positive financial balance we also strongly focus on environment and society." Sustainability and social responsible enterprising can melt together in chocolate production.

We were convinced we had to set a new standard ourselves. A standard that reaches further than the legal obligations. We have to arm ourselves for the future.

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Kim's Chocolates was founded in Aarschot (BE) as a chocolate manufacturer, but because it touched the limits of the industrial zone Nieuwland, a move was unavoidable. "In Tienen (BE) we could create a new enterprise from scratch. We also grabbed that opportunity to build our company in the most energy saving way possible," refers Fons Maex to an investment of no less than 17 million euro. "In the food sector there are strict directives anyway, but we were convinced we had to set a new standard ourselves. A standard that reaches further than the legal obligations. We have to arm ourselves for the future." The future indeed requires rational use of natural basic and fuel resources.

The ambition to become the greenest chocolate factory in Europe started to increasingly take shape with the input of the architect, the late Olivier Mas of 4-Takt architects' bureau and also the Edibo team. Not only was all the construction work done with recyclable materials, but the building method too was such as to use as little energy as possible and still make the necessary energy fully renewable. "The complete roof is installed with solar panels, there are almost 3.000 of them and they enable us to fill 20 to 25% of our energy needs. We complete the rest



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with bought green electricity,” he says. A budget of 4 million euro was involved in this investment in environmentally friendly technology.

With a bio fermenter Kim's Chocolates aims to achieve even better purification results.

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“As company director you constantly have to weigh up the pros and cons and of course return on investment plays a part,” sighs Fons Maex, “but some choices cannot be based on figures alone. In this company we need lots of water which lead us, among other things, to collecting rain water for non-production related processes. We also wanted to make extra efforts in order to purify our own waste water even better.” According to the top man of the chocolate factory this waste water mainly contains food nutrients such as sugars, cacao butter and other fats, proteins and the like. Nutrients which are better removed before the waste water disappears in the sewer. The effort is not really limited to a standard purification installation however.

With a bio fermenter Kim's Chocolates aims to achieve even better purification results. Filtering based on organic fermentation is a new method for smaller food industries whereby up to 90% of nutrients can be removed from the waste water and then used as agricultural fertiliser. “This is an installation as part of a trial project where a container is filled with various fractions of coconut, always in layers, on which the nutrients will attach and that way the water is purified. It also has a financial advantage because it saves us 17.000 euro in environmental taxes. That way it becomes interesting.”

With hardly relenting investment impulse the company management wants to continue on the path they took with the new building in Tienen (BE). “The energy use must be limited or rationalised as much as possible. We continue to make efforts. The core of our company, i.e. the production lines where the chocolate is made, is literally encapsulated

in an isolated cocoon. Temperature is particularly important during and after production too. The temperature setting of the building will take as much energy as possible from the inside air to cool down suctioned outside air in summer or heat it up in winter.”

Fons Maex is intent to move the signposts in the sector and even wants to strive for a status of complete sustainable production. That even exceeds reducing the ecological footprint. “We have quite a few achievements to undertake. We do realise that. 80 to even 85% of the raw materials we need are getting to us in a liquid state in lorries, so we don't need any packaging any more. For the other purchases we are faced with a lot of thinking to do.” That aspect of the supply chain is a lot more difficult to change. However. “What we already do now is looking for high quality and sustainable produced raw materials and for chocolate that is: cacao,” continues the top man who sees this also as an element of socially responsible enterprising.

As a company Kim's Chocolates is aware it can fill an important function with cacao beans growers. “In Tanzania - where we source one part of our beans - the production of an average grower varies between 200 and 300 kg beans per year. We participate in the Biolands projects where the harvest is bought at a much higher price than the market price and simultaneously investments are made in the local knowledge of processing methods. That's how you create a greater harvest and more quality which benefits the farmer too. That type of projects doubles or even triples their income after three to four years. That means a high progress in welfare.”

This socially responsible enterprise's vision even goes further than fair buying of raw materials. The employees of Kim's Chocolates each year commit to a project in which the company itself wishes to make a substantial difference in a country like Tanzania. “We all do our bit. That goes from fund raising actions for creating schools there or the purchase of school books even to transferring our written off ICT equipment to improve the infrastructure there.”



Kim's Chocolates also openly communicates with clients about this approach and strives to buy the sustainable chocolate which is a bit more expensive than the ordinary. "If the buyers of warehouses get involved in the story, those few eurocents do not make much of a difference to us, to them and the consumer. The effect does ensure a huge difference at the source of the chocolate: with the cacao farmers."

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The fact that they emphasise sustainability as a distinguishing factor is not that obvious for a food company that has to make great investments in production and hygiene anyway. But all employees of the Tienen (BE) company are supporting this approach. It goes a lot further than just producing delicious Belgian chocolate. Kim's Chocolate promptly has become a player with a 28 million euro turnover and one of the most sustainable chocolate manufacturers in Europe.

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Christophe De Schauvre for REcentre
Interviewee /
Fons Maex, Chief Executive Officer

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Sector • Food

Year of foundation • 1987

Number of employees • 100

Turnover (2010) •
28 million EUR