

FAMILY RUN WITH AN INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK

International Confectionery's Editor, Kiran Grewal, sits down with Ignor Riccardi, Sales Director at CEPI spa, to discuss the company's development and exciting new sustainable expansion

COULD YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT CEPI'S HISTORY, ITS MISSION STATEMENT AND THE HERITAGE OF THE BUSINESS THAT INEVITABLY SHAPES THE COMPANY TODAY?

CEPI was born in 1985 from the meeting between an engineer and a manufacturer. Combining their experience in designing and building machinery for the European food industry, Ceccarelli Pierdomenico (whose name and surname's initial syllables gave CEPI its name) and Giuseppe Milanesi set out to create a company that wasn't just a business venture but an idea factory. CEPI's mission statement has not changed since our beginnings and goes beyond assembling machinery: we build turn-key installations that manage the production line from storage to dosing, all the while developing specialised solutions to match diverse and ever-changing needs across the planet. Our vision has always been centred around research as well as flexibility and customisation. Giancarlo Riccardi and Marino Montalti, who joined the direction a few years later, shared this focus on technology and customer-oriented approach, and shaped the sales and production departments around it.

In 2021, we are one of the major bulk-handling providers for the food industry globally, with offices in Malaysia to coordinate operations in the Asian market and a network of local partners spanning the five continents. We have worked for some of the most important companies from all food sectors of food manufacturing, designing, manufacturing and commissioning turn-key systems for the storage, conveying and metering of raw materials, as well as fully integrated automation and technologies to complete all production processes. After building more than 10.000 installations the world over, we still consider ourselves a family-run company with an international outlook, whose most important product is not any single technology but the installation, and whose most important service is customisation.

HOW DID CEPI ADAPT ITS WORKING MODEL THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC? DID YOU FACE UNCERTAIN SITUATIONS - HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

Because CEPI's working model has always been flexible and involving a great deal of digital tools, the shift has not been hard for us. A large percentage of our operations can now be



smoothly run remotely. We have developed tools to connect with new people, such as virtual tours of our factory and offices. Our products and installations can be explored through simulations and 3D animations, and we have developed webinars to showcase our technologies and share our expertise on topics as varied as food technology, automation and financing.

In terms of commissioning, assistance, and training, we were ready in many ways: we have always provided such services remotely and we have further boosted our processes to ensure that our projects are fully taken care of. Many of our installations have been assembled remotely, and we can count on a worldwide network of local partners who are able to provide technological and sales related support at all stages of the project.

Because of these reasons, and because of the huge effort from everyone in our team, we are proud to say that our production and turnover have stayed stable around 28M since 2019, despite the overall downturn in markets and the logistic problems created by travelling restrictions.

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COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT THE PLANS FOR THE NEW HQ - HOW WILL IT BE POWERED, AND WILL THERE BE MORE ROOM FOR PRODUCTION?

After the exceptional 87% growth in the past decade, we are building a new facility that will triple our productive area in the coming spring of 2021 to a total of 15.000 m2, with a 13.000 m2 factory space and the rest dedicated to offices. Our new home will be powered and heated by renewable energy, including a 430 kw/h solar system, radiant floor heating, total heat recovery, recovery of rainwater for irrigation, refills for electric cars, system high efficiency heat pumps, increased insulation and high brightness shed.

The layout of the new factory has been built through a detailed study of productivity and goods flows and we expect production to be much more centralised and rational, thanks not only to the added space but the optimisation of all processes and waste reduction as well. Other important additions include automatic vertical warehouse, customs approved place, dedicated loading area, silo washing department, and much extended upper areas up to 16 mt in height for the manufacture of outdoor silos on top of our existing tower.

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WHAT LATEST TECHNOLOGIES AND INNOVATIONS HAVE YOU SEEN AT THE COMPANY?

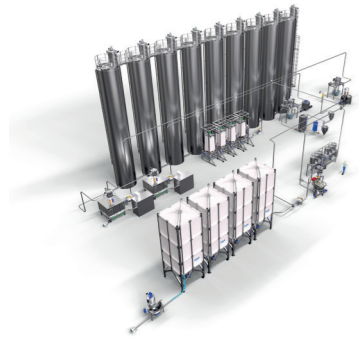
Sustainability is a key factor not only in our decision-making, but in that of food manufacturers as well! Because of this, we are working to expand the range of our reworking solutions, which already includes the recovery of bread and similar products as well as biscuit scraps both dry and liquid, with the latest addition being our systems for the reworking of sandwich biscuits.

When it comes to dosing, the 3 in 1 station is one of our most important innovations. It weighs the ingredient, separates air from product during pneumatic transport and at last blends, all in single unit. The vertical blender inside is a system to produce premix that ensures the highest flexibility across a wide range of food sectors. Fast, accurate and clean, 3 in 1 optimises mixing and production times and can be used to mix ingredients before dosing or in place of the dosing hopper.

We are also providing a new heat treatment for outdoor silos that ensures sanitification and total disinfestation against pests of flour and micro-organisms such as bacteria and fungi. This treatment has zero environmental impact and doesn't require downtime after application as it doesn't generate residuals.

WHAT ARE THE LATEST TRENDS AND MARKET INSIGHT YOU ARE SEEING IN THE CONFECTIONERY MARKET?

The biggest trend we are seeing is towards healthy products. This includes bio food with related concerns about cultivation and storage, and ➔



nutraceutical/functional foods which add active components to provide added benefits such as reducing the risk of diseases and increasing energy, mental clarity, fitness and anti-aging.

Alongside this there is also interest in products perceived as traditional or authentic. Products from the past are associated with a simpler taste and fragrance and employing natural ingredients and a less processed recipe. In terms of manufacturing, this demands technologies that can improve the management of the raw materials and avoid intrusive processing.

Other challenges are the conciliation between these needs and economic concerns, the new distribution channels that will emerge and the support of sustainability efforts.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO AUTOMATIC DOSING SYSTEMS AND WHY IS DIGITALISATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF TECHNOLOGY AN IMPORTANT STEP FOR THE COMPANY TO GROW?

CEPI provides fully integrated automation of our bulk-handling systems. Production

is managed through multiple operator panel solutions, and our native software provides process control, warehouse management and full traceability as well as total information exchange through SQL database and communication with ERP or MES. Weighing control in real time is provided for all our storing and dosing stations, along with the management of all other variables involved such as temperature and pH. Hardware and software design is done completely in-house, which allows us to provide technical and human continuity through the development of a project that can become very specific and complex.

Each of our automation systems is tailor-made to match analysis of raw materials, site evaluation, environment and consumptions. It's designed through a comprehensive study of the manufacturer's processes that concerns all operations from warehouse to marketing to allow the inclusion of future projected productions. This highly customised system will not only ensure a unique and high-quality product, but also enhance traceability and communication with other software and ERP, provide higher efficiency and production volumes, reduce consumptions and pollutions and improve working conditions. Our systems also make productions more hygienic, with total separation between production and warehouse and optimise space in both areas.

WHAT FUTURE PROJECTS WILL CEPI BE WORKING ON AND WHAT CAN WE EXPECT TO SEE GOING FORWARD?

We are expecting the economy to rebound,

and with restrictions lifting we are expecting to meet people again in venues such as fair trades, but not only. All in all, we think there will be many opportunities for new projects which will put our new headquarters to good work! However, as we shift back into normality, we plan to integrate the solutions and tools we developed facing COVID-19 to make our working model even more flexible.

The new headquarters include a 240 m2 testing and prototyping room fitted with metrology room, which is a testament to our dedication to research and will help us provide even further customisation to our customers, as well as food technology assistance and assistance in developing recipe and mixes.

We are looking into insourcing as many processes as we can to offer an even more complete product to our customers, and we want to explore new markets such as meat and brewery. The new headquarters, as big an accomplishment as it is, is only just the beginning! **IC**

