

# INFORM

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# FORWARD- LOOKING.

Dear Readers

Energy prices have consistently been a theme in almost every conversation I've had over the past few months. The subject routinely comes up whether I'm talking with a customer, a partner or a colleague from the industry. Everyone comments on the unusually turbulent energy market. While we had to pay more for electricity than ever before last summer in Switzerland, and only narrowly avoided a power shortage last winter, the situation here has now eased somewhat. But we are still a long way from stability. This represents a major challenge for our production, which, as I'm sure you can imagine, is heavily dependent on electrical energy. But you, dear readers, probably also have your own tales of woe when it comes to energy prices.

So, with energy prices so volatile and the threat of shortages looming, it makes sense to me that companies should endeavour to produce as much electricity as they can to cover their operational needs. Here at Otto Hofstetter AG, we are following our own advice as we build our new technical centre for Otto Systems. The entire roof area of the new building will be equipped with solar panels to supply a large part of the energy we need for production.

It can hardly be a coincidence that the two customers we profile in this issue of *inform* are also pursuing the same



strategy. EnergoPET, near Belgrade in Serbia, has been producing PET preforms for the home market and neighbouring countries since 1997 and is one of the most important reform suppliers in the Balkans. They are also installing a photovoltaic system on the roof of their new warehouse that will supply the electricity for secure production. And Belgium's DECA has already had such a system in place for several years. On the roof of its architecturally striking production hall, solar panels generate considerable electrical energy for the company's use. DECA even goes a couple of steps further. Waste heat from production is integrated into the heating system for the offices while rainwater is collected and circulated for non-sensitive uses.

I suspect the list of customers who are involved in generating their own energy, planned or already in operation, would include many more examples. To me, this is yet another example of the forward-thinking, problem-solving nature of true entrepreneurs. And, of course, I am proud that many of these companies are among our longest-standing customers. With this spirit in mind, I wish you a rewarding time reading the latest issue of *inform*, our customer magazine. And I look forward to visiting with you soon, whether at a trade fair, here in Uznach or at your location.

Your Stefan Zatti

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# ALWAYS AVAILABLE.

**EnergoPET** has been producing **PET preforms** for numerous applications since 1997. The company is located half an hour from the Serbian metropolis of Belgrade, near the main north-south and east-west road nexus. Managing Director **Miroslav Popović** talks about the company's positioning in the region, offers some background on its history and takes a look ahead into the future.

**I've read that EnergoPET has the biggest capacity of any PET packaging manufacturer in the region. What does this mean in concrete numbers?**

EnergoPET is currently running 10 production lines 24/7, all year round. Our current capacity enables us to produce 1.2 billion PET preforms per year. As is usual in our business, we are also subject to seasonal fluctuations in sales.

**Which products and which dimensions do you offer?**

We focus exclusively on the production of high-quality PET preforms. Our range includes five different neck finishes and covers all bottle sizes from 0.25 to 3 litres. We mainly produce preforms for the beverage industry. However, applications for milk, household chemicals and beer are also on offer. And we can also provide a wide range of colours for all preforms.

**EnergoPET began operations in 1997. What have been the company's most important milestones to date?**

A new course was set for the business in 2012, with far-reaching effects. A new investor was needed to provide the funding necessary for the further expansion of the company. It was our great good fortune to find what we were looking for with Austria's Varioform. Their many years of experience in PET preform production has helped EnergoPET move forward in a variety of ways.

The second milestone was the introduction of our new IT system. Tasks that used to require a lot of people are now largely automated. For example, when an octabin is full, a label is automatically printed out, production costs are instantly determined, stock levels are updated, and the costs are charged to the customer. Thus, we are up to date in all areas of our production in real time. This increases our quality, speeds up processes and frees up high-value human resources that can be better used elsewhere.

**“OUR IT SOLUTION  
INCREASES QUALITY,  
ACCELERATES PROCESSES  
AND FREES UP  
VALUABLE RESOURCES”**

Miroslav Popović, Managing Director of EnergoPET

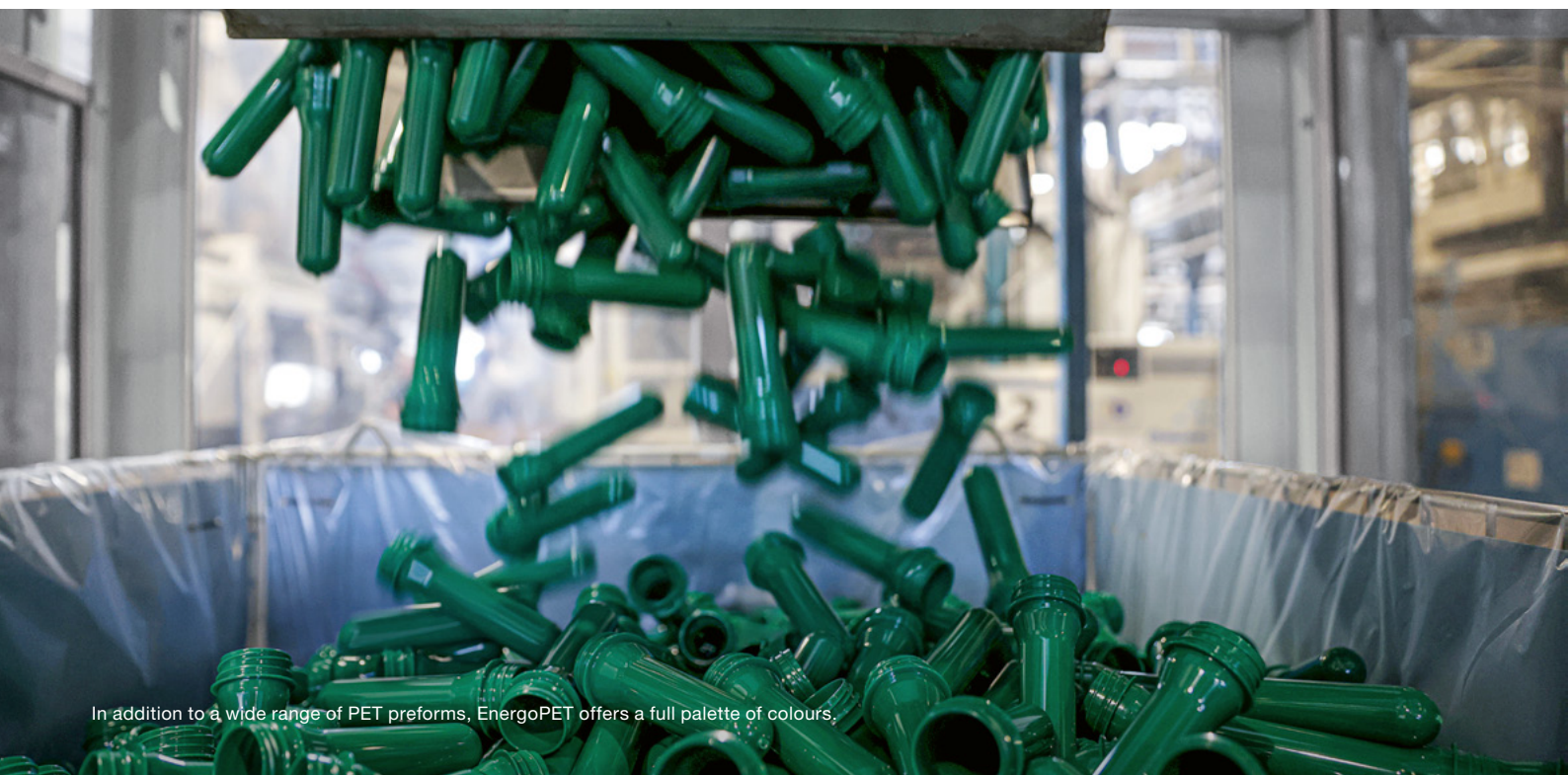
**EnergoPET sells around 70 per cent of its production in Serbia. Where does the rest go?**

Our main export markets are Croatia, North Macedonia, Romania, Bosnia, Montenegro and, from time to time, Hungary. Our experience has shown that we can offer our products competitively within a radius of about 600 kilometres. At longer distances,

the transport costs are just too much, which is critical in our price-sensitive business.

**What are your bestsellers?**

PCO preforms may outweigh other products a little bit, but EnergoPET doesn't really have one product that clearly outperforms all others in terms of sales. Applications and formats vary from customer to customer. One interesting development: there seems to be a move towards transparent preforms among our customers. The recent trend of bottles with fancy





EnergopET focuses exclusively on the production of high-quality PET preforms.

colours seems to be over. This is advantageous, both in terms of recyclability and production costs.

**EnergopET claims to cover all the needs of the domestic market, and it continues to grow. In which specific areas do you see potential for EnergopET's further growth?**

With our range, we can meet all the needs of PET preform users. In terms of quantities, we now cover around 40 per cent of domestic demand. I don't consider it realistic to increase this rate by crowding out the competition. We are focused on growing by 5 to 10 per cent, in step with the organic growth of PET generally. If we can top that mark, all the better. Basically, our growth strategy builds on the long-term loyalty of our customers.

**EnergopET's customers are also strong in dairy products. How do you see the future of this segment?**

In general, this is a very attractive area for us, one that we

can serve well with our know-how and experience. In contrast to the water business, there is no seasonality with dairy products, and we think it can help compensate for fluctuating capacities. This would be a strong positive for our systems and our organisation.

**"WE BOUGHT THE FIRST MOULD FROM OTTO HOFSTETTER AG IN 1997 AND IT IS STILL IN USE."**

*Miroslav Popović, Managing Director of EnergopET*

**Why doesn't EnergopET offer multilayer solutions for dairy products?**

In previous years there have been some requests for multilayer. But today, this approach has lost much of its appeal since the manufacturing costs are higher compared to monolayer preforms

and the barrier properties of colours have improved significantly. Monolayer packaging also has clear advantages from a recycling point of view, I should add.

**EnergopET specialises in PET. Which packaging segments could still be replaced by PET in your market?**

In the dairy products segment in particular, I see real expansion



EnergopET prefers to train its specialists itself, also making use of the programmes offered by its machine, mould and equipment partners.

sion potential. Plasticised cardboard packaging, which is still widely used in many places, has a poorer ecological balance than packaging made of PET. A rethinking can be seen in the market these days. For me, however, applications using glass come first. The weight of glass packaging requires significantly more energy to transport than lightweight PET. The market has noticed this, which is why PET is being used more and more frequently in the food, household chemicals and cosmetics sectors.

**In many countries, plastic has a very serious image problem.**

**What do people in the Balkans think about plastic packaging?**

There is no broad public opposition to plastic as there is in Western countries. Or maybe I should add: "not yet". I see the reason for this in the general pace of our social development and the level of prosperity. However, we can assume that it is only a matter of time before that benign view about plastic changes.

**What about recycling in Serbia?**

We still have a very low collection rate for plastics. The authori-

ties want to change this by introducing a deposit system for bottles. This idea has been under discussion for a number of years. In my opinion, it's the only way that recycling can reach significant levels. The public does not yet know when this recycling system might begin.

**What is the situation at EnergopET with regard to alternative raw materials?**

We have two customers for whom we regularly used post consumer resin PCR. Meanwhile, they have moved back to virgin PET. In terms of production, we are able to process PCR when asked to do so. Thanks to our parent company, we have in-depth know-how with this material. As you probably know, Varioform was the first supplier in Europe to use PCR commercially.

**EnergopET promises to always meet the needs of producers and consumers. How do you ensure that?**

The keyword here is support. At EnergopET, we not only deliver a flawless product, we also frequently exchange ideas

**"ENERGOPET ALWAYS STRIVES TO DELIVER OPTIMUM RESULTS FOR THE CUSTOMER AND FOR EFFICIENT PRODUCTION."**

Miroslav Popović, Managing Director of EnergopET

with our customers and other specialists in order to achieve the best results. We also offer to accompany the entire design process and look at all aspects of the bottle and its form. And we can also provide samples on request. Our aim is always to achieve the optimum results for the customer through a partnership-based cooperation.

**You work with high-tech, high-mech precision equipment. This requires qualified employees. How do you find them?**

We maintain good relations with some of the best technical schools in our area, and we invite them on factory tours, since our type of production is not commonplace. In addition, Serbia has also recently launched a dual-track education programme, offering classes and practical work experience for the students. We fully support this approach, as we prefer to develop our professionals ourselves. We also make use of the training programmes offered by our machine, mould and device partners. Finally, it is also important to us to form our talented employees into a well-oiled team, because the best engineer or best manager in the world cannot do anything on his or her own. Everyone needs to contribute.

**In addition to the scarcity of skilled workers, high energy prices are a major concern for many companies. What's the situation like in Serbia?**

The energy market is not as developed as it is in Austria or Germany. Our main supplier is a state-owned company and they base their pricing policy on prices in the West. This means that the energy costs are also a problem for us. For this reason, we plan to produce our own energy, covering the roof of our warehouse with solar panels, which will not only bring cost benefits but also increase our independence.

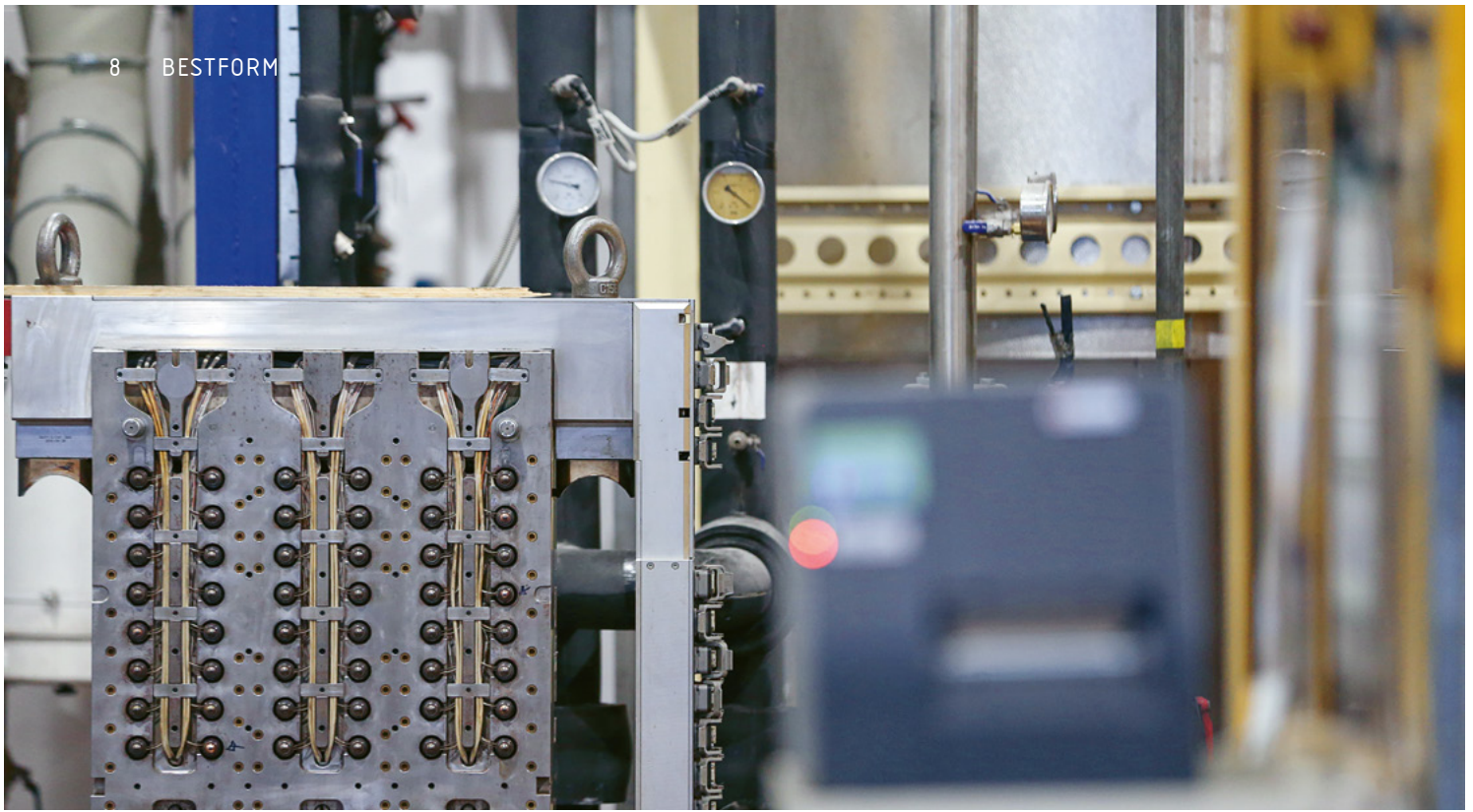
**EnergopET products are known for their high quality. What does a mould have to provide in order to be used at our company?**

In everything we do, we pay attention to availability. That's how we judge granulate, the machine capacity and our stock of preforms. Accordingly, we also expect a high availability of our injection moulds. During high season, we utilise the moulds of Otto Hofstetter AG to 90 per cent and to 75 per cent on average over the year. Their performance absolutely meets our



**"BASED ON MY OBSERVATIONS, I SUSPECT THAT BEING THE CHEAPEST WILL SOON NO LONGER BE THE MOST IMPORTANT MARKET DIFFERENTIATOR. OTHER CRITERIA WILL GAIN IN IMPORTANCE."**

Miroslav Popović, Managing Director of EnergopET



expectations. Furthermore, a mould must function for many years just as it did on day one. Here, too, our partner from Switzerland scores well. The first mould, which we bought in 1997, is still in use.

**You originally studied computer science and then worked in this field. How are you dealing with introducing the Internet of Things (IoT) or augmented reality (AR) technologies into your production?**

For me, these developments are very interesting. I follow them very closely and I also see potential for our type of production in some of the innovations. In day-to-day business, however, we are still a long way from being able to efficiently use the already existing solutions. Before introducing new technologies, our basic infrastructure would need to be upgraded. With all my fascination for IoT and AR, we mustn't forget that in the end it's the people who really make the difference.

**Does this mean IoT and AR are just fantasies of the future? What will EnergoPET look like in five to seven years?**

Looking at the numbers, EnergoPET is now a sizeable and well-established company. In order to maintain its current levels, we are striving for restrained, long-term, sustainable growth. We will achieve this goal by continuing to pay close attention to our employees and by making well-considered investments. For example, we are actively looking at technolo-

gies that can reduce our energy consumption and our carbon footprint. This will help keep us competitive. When it comes

to differentiation in the market, I think price will soon no longer be the decisive criterion.

**What do you mean by that?**

Based on my observations, I think that being the cheapest will soon no longer be the most important consideration for customers. Other criteria, such as the carbon footprint, recyclability, flexibility and reliability, will gain in impor-

tance. Thanks to the strengths of our parent company, we are already well positioned in these areas and we are ready to meet the future together.

**Thank you for this insightful interview, Mr Popović. We wish you and your team continued success.**

**"A MOULD MUST FUNCTION FOR MANY YEARS JUST AS IT DID ON DAY ONE. HERE, TOO, OUR PARTNER FROM SWITZERLAND SCORES WELL."**

*Miroslav Popović, Managing Director of EnergoPET*

**EP**  
*et*

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EnergoPET Ltd.  
[www.energopet.com](http://www.energopet.com)  
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Founded in 1997  
Limited company  
Specialist in high-quality PET preforms for water, soft drinks, milk, household chemicals and beer.  
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Partizanska bb, Krnješevci 22314, Serbia  
.....



A man with a beard, wearing a dark jacket and black gloves, is looking upwards and to the right. He is holding a blue plastic bottle in his gloved hand. The background is a bright blue sky with large, flowing sheets of yellow plastic material draped over it, creating a sense of movement and scale.

# 100 PER CENT ACHIEVABLE.

Comprehensive recycling combined with using CO<sub>2</sub> extracted from the atmosphere and from biomass could make a fully sustainable plastics industry a reality, according to a new study from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich. The researchers suggest that transforming plastic's image as a cheap material could also be helpful.

Plastic is everywhere. Our society cannot do without it. Plastic has numerous advantages. It's an extremely versatile and inexpensive material. Today, plastics are mainly made from petroleum. Unfortunately, when plastic products reach the end of their useful life, they often end up in an incinerator, and burning plastic releases very harmful toxic chemicals into the environment. One way to avoid this would be to stringently apply sustainable production methods to plastic, incorporating the material into a circular economy in which as much plastic as possible is recycled. This would mean that the main raw material for plastic would no longer be petroleum but rather would be shredded plastic waste. But can the plastics industry really be made 100 per cent sustainable? Researchers from the renowned Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich have demonstrated the feasibility of this game-changer in a recent study.

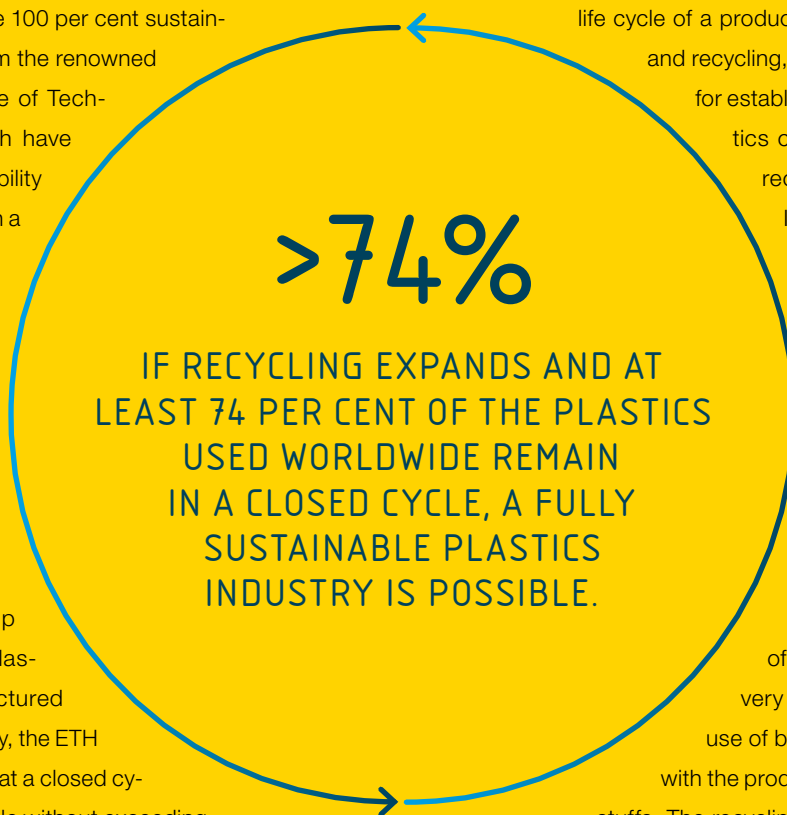
The research team analysed the complete value chains of the 14 most common types of plastic, such as polyethylene, polypropylene and polyvinyl chloride. They make up 90 per cent of the plastic products manufactured worldwide. In their study, the ETH researchers showed that a closed cycle for plastics is feasible without exceeding the earth's capacity to function in a healthy manner, that is, its "planetary boundaries"<sup>1</sup>. To achieve safe levels for plastic production, the study determined that at least 74 per cent of the plastic we use needs to be recycled. The study also notes that recycling processes need to be improved.

According to the ETH scientists, the carbon needed for producing the remaining 26 per cent of the plastics we use could be obtained using two technologies: carbon capture and utilisation<sup>2</sup> (CCU), which separates CO<sub>2</sub> from combustion processes or from the atmosphere, and bioenergy with carbon capture and storage<sup>3</sup> (BECCS), which extracts energy from biomass and is sometimes called a "negative emissions technology". "Recycling alone is not enough, we need all three pillars," says lead author André Bardow, Professor of Energy

and Process Systems Engineering at ETH Zurich. "A global recycling rate of 74 per cent is a very ambitious goal," admits Bardow. However, he considers it realistic to achieve by 2050.

The researchers point out that plastic products will have to be better adapted to the circular economy in the future. To this end, manufacturers should work more closely with recyclers. According to the study, it would be desirable if plastics manufacturers had a broader understanding of the responsibility they bear. Today, responsibility usually ends when the product leaves the factory gates. The scientists are calling for product responsibility to be extended to cover the entire life cycle of a product. This includes disposal and recycling, which serve as the basis for establishing a sustainable plastics cycle. One thing is clear: recycling is the way to go. It does not have any serious disadvantages, which is why it should be a top priority in the transformation of the economy towards sustainability, and there are conflicting goals, as there can be in many other areas. For example, the production of synthetic fuels, which is very energy-intensive. Or the use of biomass, which competes with the production of important foodstuffs. The recycling of plastic, on the other hand, does not lead to such conflicting objectives. "Recycling should be intensified wherever possible," says Bardow. "A good rule of thumb is: more recycling of plastic always leads to more sustainability."

Source: ETH Zurich



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html>

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon\\_capture\\_and\\_utilization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_capture_and_utilization)

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bioenergy\\_with\\_carbon\\_capture\\_and\\_storage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bioenergy_with_carbon_capture_and_storage)



# SIMPLE AND FAIR.

**DECAPAC NV** is a Belgian family business specialising in **single-use rigid packaging** for chilled food. **CEO Patrik De Cat** is part of the second generation of his family to lead the company, and he adheres to the virtues that have made it successful. The headquarters in Herentals is **geared towards sustainability** and embodies the company slogan. *inform* got to the bottom of it.

**Mr De Cat, when people visit you in Herentals, the unusually designed building immediately catches their eye. I've read that the façade panels were specially developed for you. How important is good design to you?**

I'm a big fan of good design and I love clever technical solutions that also look good. With this in mind, we started the project for the new building and deliberately hired an architect that had no experience in our industry. After all, we don't want standard solutions. Rather, we wanted a building that was tailored to our needs in all areas. Accordingly, they began their work by asking us a lot of questions. We spent more than a year defining how the process steps in production can be optimally designed and which facilities were ideal for this. Only when all this was clear, down to the last detail, did they develop the design of the building's envelope. The façade panels are indeed custom-made. They serve to break up the light in different ways and thus differentiate areas of the large space.

**In its own way, the building epitomises your brand promise. How do you understand "Packed to Impact"?**

The slogan only came after the new building was erected.

"Packed to Impact" is something like the manifesto of our company. DECA strives to partner with ambitious food companies that aim for quality and want to stand out from the competition on the shelves. We provide them with all the necessary packaging services.

**To what extent is good design a question of budget?**

Good design does not have to be expensive. This idea also guided us when we built our building. DECA is a typical family-run SME. Investments have to be weighed very carefully. That's why we set ourselves a budget that was normal for projects of our size. What applies to our building also applies to our packaging. Design must first and foremost be well thought out and functional in order to be convincing.

**Which trends are currently determining packaging design?**

I think we finally have put a phase of stagnation behind us. This lull, which halted the development of many projects, was due to the twin crises of Covid and the energy price shock. Brands didn't want to further unsettle their consumers with new packaging during the pandemic, and countless new developments



DECAPAC's striking headquarters was designed entirely to meet the needs of optimal production.



In unannounced BRC audits, DECA achieves the highest marks almost every time, reflecting the strong quality focus of its employees.

fell victim to savings efforts due to skyrocketing energy prices. From what we've been able to see over the past few months, however, this standstill appears to be over. But right now, new designs are not in high demand. Rather, packaging trends are moving in the direction of mono-materials, recyclability and weight reduction, in my view.

**To what extent are consumers paying more attention to the sustainability of the packaging than to its appearance?**

I believe functionality and appearance are still very important. Packaging should protect the product, retain moisture, be resealable and be suitable for both the microwave and the freezer. When it comes to improving the ecological balance of packaging, consumers are more likely to respond to pressure from governments and the brands' own initiatives.

**In your communications, you talk about food safety, consistent quality and an attractive product. How do you achieve these goals in the hustle and bustle of everyday life?**

DECA has grown from a small into a medium-sized company. As we have grown, we have always introduced numerous quality control procedures and systems. But the most important step was the design of our production facilities in the new building. We based our design on the guidelines that apply in food production and designed our building accordingly. Thus, our BRC audits do not take place, as is usual, with prior

notification. With us, quality checks take place spontaneously. In the tests so far, we have almost always achieved the highest marks. This shows how consistently our employees have focused on quality.

**DECA specialises in the use of mono-plastics and even uses them for IML packaging. What are the advantages and disadvantages of monoplastics?**

Ninety-five per cent of our business is single-use rigid packaging for supermarket chilled foods. Since the requirements for these products in terms of barrier properties are not particularly high, polypropylene is ideally suited for these applications. But more than that, we believe no other material can match polypropylene in this sector in terms of its versatility and relatively modest environmental impact.

**How do you see developments in the recycling of polypropylene?**

Solutions made from recycled materials already exist on the market. These materials currently come from chemical recycling. However, I am confident that in the next four to seven years we will be using recycled and food-grade materials that have been mechanically processed. I've been in the industry for 25 years now and have seen numerous trials with bio-based raw materials. So far none has been successful. For me, the future clearly lies in the closed material cycle. For this reason, I think the industry, politicians and consumers should focus on recycling.

**When your father founded DECA in 1978, plastics were hardly used in the food industry. How has the company developed?**

When I started, my father had bought a small trading company based in Brussels. The range of products included glassware and matching metal screw caps as well as packaging, dosing and filling machines. He was already somewhat familiar with plastics from his previous job, and when plastic began to be used as a packaging material for the emerging ready-to-serve meals in the early 1980s, he adjusted his offering accordingly. The demand kept increasing, which is why we started to produce and export plastic packaging ourselves. Today, it generates around 85 per cent of our revenues. The remaining income still comes from my father's original business.

**Which countries do you export to today?**

Although we still call ourselves a small company, we are very international. The most important trading partners are Great Britain, France, Germany and the Netherlands. In principle, we serve all of Europe – including Switzerland. In addition, we have been working with a committed sales partner in Australia since the beginning of 2000.

**DECA has been internationally successful for more than 40 years. Which factors are decisive for your excellent track record?**

On the one hand, it is certainly the consistently excellent quality that we have already talked about. On the other hand, our success is probably also due to our very broad and flexible product range. With its standard range, DECA covers most of the needs of companies in our sector. We also work with product families, which means, for example, that we offer different packaging volumes for one lid. This gives customers a great deal of freedom. For instance, they can use a 400 ml pack instead of a 300 ml pack for a promotion without having to change the filling and packaging machine. Where we also score is with our flexibility, which allows us to produce relatively small quantities economically.

**It is part of the DECA philosophy to think about your own footprint. Belgium has targeted reaching carbon net zero by 2050. What goals have you defined for DECA?**

We have not set a specific goal or date. However, we use every opportunity to keep our environmental footprint as small as

possible. As an injection moulding company, we naturally use a considerable amount of electricity. We have been producing part of it for 10 years with our solar system on the roof. The remaining energy that we purchase comes exclusively from certified renewable sources. We use the waste heat from our production to heat the offices and the dock levellers in winter so that they remain free of ice. In addition, we collect the rainwater that falls on our large roof area and use it to flush toilets and for other less sensitive applications. Last but not least, we insulated our building more than necessary and installed an automatic shade system.

**Where do you see the future development of sustainability in the packaging sector?**

In principle, plastics, and in our case polypropylene, already have a good ecological balance sheet compared to other materials. If we can improve the circular economy and increase recycling, the footprint of our raw material will be further reduced. If we as a company focus on our own carbon footprint and reduce it as much as possible, we are already achieving a groundbreaking goal. If we combine this with increased use of recycled material when that time comes, we will have an optimal solution.

**"IF WE AS A COMPANY  
CONCENTRATE ON REDUCING  
OUR OWN CO<sub>2</sub> FOOTPRINT  
TO THE MAX, WE WILL  
ALREADY ACHIEVE A  
GROUNDBREAKING RESULT."**

*Patrik De Cat, CEO of DECAPAC NV*

**Although DECA builds its own injection moulds, you bought your first mould from Otto Hofstetter AG in 2018. What prompted that decision?**

The focus of our mould department is on revision, maintenance and repair work. So far, we have only built a few complete forms. Our department consists of only a few professionals, and the infrastructure is manageable. As a small organisation, trying to do both repair work and manufacturing yourself is difficult and ultimately does not bring the desired results.

**Why did you choose Otto Hofstetter AG?**

On the one hand, we appreciate Swiss quality and that's what Otto Hofstetter AG delivers. On the other hand, we Belgians are flexible, which is what we expect from our partners. In this respect, too, we are well served by the people from Uznach. They listen, take our proposals seriously and are interested in jointly coming up with the best solution. We've never encountered a hint of the often-cited Swiss stubbornness with Otto Hofstetter AG people. Quite the contrary: like us, they welcome a positive exchange of ideas.



**To what extent did the fact that Otto Hofstetter AG is also family-run play a role in selecting them?**

The family business structure is probably one of the reasons for the flexibility that we value very much with Otto Hofstetter AG. In addition to the fact that the employees have extensive skills, we know that Mr Hofstetter is there, in the background. Thanks to the short information paths and transparent decision-making within the company, he can – if necessary – decide at very short notice whether something works or not.

**Where do you see potential for improvement at Otto Hofstetter AG?**

I don't feel competent enough to judge this. I prefer to rely on the feedback from my specialists in production. And I didn't get any complaints from that side. Orders for the latest moulds give an indication of how projects may deliver even better results in the future. We discussed our needs and ideas in detail beforehand. It may have taken some time, but the result is now convincing for both parties. With quality moulds like this, it's definitely worth having discussions beforehand to avoid having to make changes afterwards.

**Both DECA and Otto Hofstetter AG strive to reduce the use of materials. Where do you see potential for further reductions?**

In many applications, the mechanical properties of polypropylene would allow the wall thickness to be further reduced using a special mould. Since most of our customers at DECA choose their products from the standard range, we have not yet exhausted these possibilities, because each of our products is used for a different application or processed in a different way. We design our products to be universally applicable, which doesn't mean that we don't also consider how we can reduce the use of raw materials. We strive for the 90 per cent solution, not the 100 per cent one.

**You joined the company in 1998 as logistics manager and B2B sales manager. A lot has changed since then. Has anything stayed the same since your father's time?**

Yes, in 1998 I officially joined DECA. But, like children in many other entrepreneurial families, I suppose, I helped out at the company earlier, at weekends and during the school holidays. Then as now, DECA is shaped by the mentality of the people in this part of Belgium. They like things simple and fair. Some say

we are not enthusiastic enough. But we are humble, focused on what we do and proud of what emerges. If we promise something, we will do everything we can to make it happen.

**DECA now has sales of more than EUR 38 million and operates in over 37 countries. What will your company look like in five to seven years?**

Our goal is to continue to grow organically and to continue to lead in our market with pioneering products. It will be crucial that our organisation remains flexible and that we can count on the right employees. Achieving this goal entails proactive planning in coordination with our customers. That will not always be easy. At the same time, I'm very confident that, in 10 years, DECA will have

produced packaging for many key market players and will have doubled its sales.

**Mr De Cat, thank you for this open and interesting discussion. We wish you every success in the future.**

**“THE PEOPLE FROM OTTO  
HOFSTETTER AG  
LISTEN TO US. THEY  
TAKE OUR IDEAS SERIOUSLY  
AND STRIVE TO  
FIND THE BEST SOLUTION.”**

*Patrik De Cat, CEO of DECAPAC NV*

**DECA**® Packed  
to impact

DECA Packaging Group NV  
www.deca.be

Family-owned company  
Founded in 1978  
Specialist in plastic packaging, recyclable packaging and  
plastic containers with IML; glass and metal packaging;  
packaging machines.

Toekomstlaan 28, 2200 Herentals, Belgium



A scenic landscape of a Swiss lake with mountains and forests. The image shows a calm lake reflecting the surrounding environment. In the background, there are rugged mountains with patches of snow. The middle ground is filled with dense green and yellow forests. The foreground shows the clear, blue water of the lake, which reflects the sky and the surrounding landscape. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

# LIQUID GOLD.

Switzerland has an abundance of pure, fresh water, the quantity and the quality of which are hard to beat. The population is conscious of its good fortune and treats its water resources responsibly. Thus, it's only natural that the engineers at Otto Hofstetter AG pay close attention to the water used in their moulds and work constantly to optimise how it is used in cooling.



Switzerland is often described as Europe's water tower. The country not only boasts dramatic mountain landscapes; it also is notable for the remarkable quality of its drinking water. The Swiss Alps serve as a source of some of the purest drinking water in the world. Around 80 billion cubic metres of water flow out of the mountains every year. Around 75 per cent of this flow is directed to the public water supply.

The natural filtration system comprising layers of rock gives the water a remarkable purity. For example, Lake Lucerne is fed by numerous alpine lakes and mountain streams. Public fountains are ubiquitous in the country and they symbolise the importance of water as a valued resource. The generous supply of spring water means that public fountains can be found virtually everywhere, from mountain villages to large cities. Fresh spring water can be enjoyed even in the most remote alpine huts.

**Caring for water is a tradition.**

The exceptional water quality in Switzerland is not only thanks

to the natural environment; it also reflects society's commitment to preserving its environmental riches. Protecting the purity of the water in Switzerland is engrained in the population. The stewardship of this vital resource is part of their heritage.

Water quality is protected by a mix of traditional values, strict laws and sustainable practices. Lake Geneva is one of the largest lakes in Europe and is a model of sustainable water use and conservation. Visitors and locals alike enjoy the benefits of this tradition, which

is as impressive as the landscape itself.

**Water cooling for PET production.**

With this background, it's not surprising that the engineers at Otto Hofstetter AG are very alert to the use of water in their moulds. It must be kept in mind that water is only one part of the mould-cooling step of production, but it is crucial for the efficiency of the system and the quality of the preforms. The experience of almost 70 years of making injection moulds, and almost 50 years specifically in PET preform mould-making,

**"WITH ENERGY-EFFICIENT  
MOULD COOLING,  
ALL FACTORS HAVE TO  
BE OPTIMISED."**



**Sample calculation:**

LAST GEN 96 CAVITY: <b>120 M<sup>3</sup>/H</b>	NEW GEN 96 CAVITY: <b>60 M<sup>3</sup>/H</b>
DIFFERENCE <b>60 M<sup>3</sup>/H</b>	
HOURS PER YEAR <b>8766 H</b>	80 PER CENT OPERATION <b>7013 H</b>

**WATER SAVED PER YEAR  
420,780 M<sup>3</sup>**

SAVINGS CORRESPOND TO

**1 1/2 x**

**THE VOLUME OF CRESTA LAKE  
IN FLIMS IN THE ALPS**

has taught Otto Hofstetter AG's specialists that although each individual component in the system is important, the interdependencies between them must always be taken into account.

**Optimal water use is multi-layered.**

Basically, the challenge of mould-cooling is how to dissipate the heat generated in PET production in the most energy-efficient way. The technical design possibilities in cooling water handling are varied. However, aiming for a theoretical maximum solution makes little sense, as this would have a significant negative impact on manufacturing costs and delivery times. Thanks to their many years of experience, the engineers in Uznach know how to carefully weigh all relevant factors in order to achieve the optimum result.

**Innovations reinforce the effect.**

Over the past few years, Otto Hofstetter AG has succeeded in continuously reducing the water consumption of its high-tech moulds, which means that the amount of water required has been reduced by more than 50 per cent, depending on the number of cavities in the mould. In addition, new technologies such as OH-Xcool® have been developed, which have increased the cooling capacity in the threaded insert of a PET mould while reducing the cycle time by up to 15 per cent, de-

pending on the preform type. This new option is available to all operators of newer generation moulds from Otto Hofstetter AG.

**Take care when moving moulds.**

Customers all over the world give the moulds from Uznach high praise in terms of their longevity. This of course is largely due to the high-quality steel that is used and the exclusive coatings that are applied in Otto Hofstetter AG moulds.

Beyond all the built-in features to maintain the value of the moulds, the operator contributes to their resilience. By continuously checking the quality of the cooling water, costly damage caused by sludge and blockage of the cooling channels in the mould can be prevented. Care should also be taken when moving moulds from one location to another. Water residue in the mould can introduce bacteria and cause previously hidden problems at the new location.

When it comes to the cost-effectiveness of a system and the quality of the PET preform, expert support is provided by Otto Hofstetter AG to achieve the best result. So, quality goes beyond careful water management, even if the people from Uznach have a special affinity for what flows from the Swiss Alps.

# THE TEAM AS A MIRROR.



**Aristoteles Kontothanassis** heads the **PET engineering** team at Otto Hofstetter AG. He joined the company five years ago and appreciates the spirit of **personal responsibility** and the **short decision-making processes** that characterise the company. In his management role, he sees many analogies to his favourite leisure activity: working with sled dogs and occasionally competing in races.



In the summer, many people from the surrounding area come to take a refreshing dip in the Bichelsee lake. And, throughout the year, it's the starting point for a wonderful circular hike as well as numerous shorter walks. Bichelsee is about 45 minutes by car from the Otto Hofstetter AG headquarters in Uznach. The natural lake is surrounded by gentle, wooded hills and lush meadows. Here, we meet Aristoteles Kontothanassis, Otto Hofstetter AG's team leader of the PET engineering.

#### **What makes this spot so attractive for you?**

As my name suggests, I am not Swiss by birth. We moved from Germany almost 15 years ago and settled in a village near here. The picturesque shore, peaceful water, secluded forests and delightful meadows make the Bichelsee the ideal place for us. What's more, we have four dogs that need a lot of exercise, which is why we're happy to come here often, regardless of the weather. If life took me to another location, I would always return to the Bichelsee in my thoughts.

#### **What breed are your dogs?**

Three are sled dogs and one is a mixed breed that I picked up on the street in Greece and nursed back to health. They want to be challenged, which is why I go sledding with them. In winter we go out in the snow as often as time permits, and we also take part in some sled dog races. That's one big benefit of living here in Switzerland. Within an hour's drive, there are plenty of opportunities to pursue our passion: working with the dogs. And if the winter is too mild here, we go to Sweden.

#### **How important is the peace and harmony of the Bichelsee lake for you?**

Today everyone's life is very fast-moving, and we live in a state of constant overstimulation. The smartphone is our constant companion, always keeping us on our toes. In order to find a healthy balance, I consider it very important to distance myself from all of that sometimes, to switch off and not have to think about anything beyond my immediate surroundings. It was only in Switzerland that I discovered that nature could give me this kind of breather. Today, the chirping birds, the murmuring stream and the rustling of the trees are the best way for me to re-energise myself. That's why I'm deliberately try not to be available when I'm out with the dogs.

#### **How much peace do you find in your job?**

If I want peace and quiet, I call it a day or take a vacation. No, seriously: I don't need peace at work. I like it when there is a lot going on. Thanks to my great team, where everyone can rely on everyone else, we can master every workload. Like



## Aristoteles Kontothanassis

Engineering Manager PET in Uznach, which also includes the specialists from Otto Hofstetter Luxemburg SA.

When he's not working, he devotes his energies to his sled dogs, who need a lot of exercise.

every team leader, I do have tasks that require quiet focus and I reserve the early morning hours for this kind of work, or I add an hour after the working day ends. Otto Hofstetter AG also offers the opportunity to work from home, which I use from time to time.

### **You are the head of PET engineering. Do you see any parallels between your hobby as a dog sled driver and your role as a team leader?**

Oh, that list is very long, so I'll focus on what I think are the strongest points. The distribution of roles is crucial for the proper functioning of any team. Each team member has a role that they can identify with and which corresponds to their skills. It's very important that the supposedly "weakest" link is also given a meaningful task. The oil that greases the wheels of a well-functioning team is open and transparent communication. Another parallel with the dogs concerns non-verbal communication. On some level, my human team responds to my moods and attitudes as do the dogs. If I am committed, engaged and in a positive mood, my colleagues are too. If the opposite is the case, they also sense it.

### **Your team also includes colleagues in Luxembourg. How does long-distance leadership work?**

In the first two years, we laid the foundation for what we are today: a solid team of specialists, where it doesn't matter who works where. When our colleagues from Luxembourg joined us in November 2017, I drove there once a week. They were already a well-established team back then and everyone knew each other's strengths and weaknesses. My job was to integrate them into our organisation and to integrate them into our processes. When I see today how naturally the team members work together across locations, the integration appears to have been completed successfully. Covid certainly also played a part in this team-building process, as we all had to adjust to virtual meetings.

### **Where do you see the strengths of Otto Hofstetter AG?**

Before I came to Otto Hofstetter AG, I was employed by a large company. The employees there were numbers and had an annual discussion with their managers where they were listened to. At Otto Hofstetter AG, management's doors are always open. Even with the company's owner, Otto Hofstetter, no one who comes to him with a request or an idea is turned away. This kind of corporate culture also means that decision-making processes are very short and flexible. The processes are similarly undogmatic. In most companies there is no leeway in the group, but here in Uznach we enjoy considerable freedom. As long as it's in the interest of the customer and

the renowned quality of Otto Hofstetter is guaranteed, a team can take an alternative path to achieve its goals.

**Where do you see potential for improvement?**

We are very well equipped within the individual departments. Communication within the teams is also usually excellent. In my opinion, where we do have potential for optimisation is in cross-departmental interfaces, where communication occasionally falters, usually because responsibilities have not been clearly defined. However, thanks to the lean and transparent organisational structure, these hiccups are quickly resolved.

**Your name suggests Greek roots. To what extent is this assumption correct?**

Even though I was born and raised in Germany, Greece is my home, and I'm always drawn back there. We agreed in the family and the plan is in place. Sometime in the foreseeable future we will be moving "home".

**How does the Greek mentality differ from the Swiss mentality?**

Greeks are happy people. And they are loud. My colleagues in construction can tell you a little bit about that. If I'm on the phone or talking to someone, everyone in the open-plan office can hear it. Sometimes they ask me to speak a little more quietly. But I can't help it. That's my nature. We Greeks are also more emotional than the Swiss, and at the same time, we take many things more lightly. We also have different definitions of punctuality. In Greece, anyone who arrives at a meeting a minute after the appointed time is most likely to be the first. In Switzerland you are simply late.

**Would you be happy if Otto Hofstetter AG were a little more Greek?**

No, that company would no longer be Otto Hofstetter AG. We stand for quality, punctuality and precision. Because we are so typically Swiss in these important areas, our products and services enjoy an excellent reputation around the world. As a Greek, I can say that Swiss quality and Greek mentality are mutually exclusive. Or can you name any high-tech products from Greece that are as well known around the world as the moulds from Otto Hofstetter AG?

**Why is it that Swiss quality is so famous?**

Swiss companies – or at least those that take their origins seri-

ously – pay meticulous attention to every detail. Breaking an edge of metal creates two new sharp edges. At Otto Hofstetter AG, these edges are processed again so that irregularities can no longer be felt. This thoroughness and this care down to the smallest detail are what define the justly famous Swiss quality.

**What distinguishes Otto Hofstetter AG as an employer?**

In addition to the factors I mentioned earlier, employee loyalty is a clear indication of the answer. In a company where 20 or more years of service are not uncommon, there must be a climate of appreciation, sincerity and openness. I feel completely respected here, and I know I can count on the support I would get from my superiors if I ever needed it.

At Otto Hofstetter AG you are not just a human resource. You are first and foremost a human being and part of a team.

**Where are you headed with Otto Hofstetter AG?**

Otto Hofstetter AG and its subsidiary Otto Systems are growing. The next generation of the family is ready to develop the legacy of grandfather and father. I am convinced that the values that have made the company successful

over the years will be maintained and reinforced by the successors. This means that performance in terms of innovation and quality will remain at the highest level. I would love to return to Uznach a few years after my return to Greece and see how Otto Hofstetter AG has further developed.

**Thank you for these personal insights, Mr Kontothanassis. I wish you all the best for your private and professional future.**

**"IF IT'S IN THE INTERESTS OF THE CUSTOMER AND QUALITY IS GUARANTEED, A TEAM AT OTTO HOFSTETTER AG CAN FOLLOW ITS OWN PATH TO ACHIEVE ITS GOALS."**

*Aristoteles Kontothanassis, Engineering Manager PET*



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