



**Tops Foods a SME food producer and partner within Acteco**

In 1993 Rudy Tops founded Tops Foods, a food company to produce snacks, chilled and ambient ready meals. He recognised that the development of the "new patented microwave technology under pressure in a food manufacturing environment" could lead to a successful organisation. In 1996, the first ready meals were being produced, and now, 11 years later, 50 employees produce more than 80.000 meals and snacks per day.

**Products**

Tops Foods only uses fresh ingredients, such as vegetables, meat, poultry and dairy products in their range of ready meals and does not use any other additives or preservatives in their recipes and also guarantee GMO-free ingredients. The product range consists of internationally, well-known and popular meals based on rice, pasta or potatoes. Because consumers like variation, the R&D department is constantly developing new meals or optimising the existing range.

The three main groups are:

- Ambient meals of 375 grams
- Chilled meals of 350 grams
- Fingerfood Snacks

**Rudy Tops - Managing Director**

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**Ambient meals**

The products are heated between 115°C and 120°C. By this process, the product is sterilised, so it can be stocked at room temperature for over a year. Because of the ultra-short high heat treatment and the airtight packaging, the product can be preserved over such a long period.

**Chilled Meals**

Pasteurisation is a heat treatment by which products are heated to 90°C and rapidly chilled afterwards. Because of the use of microwave technology and the cleanliness of this method, pasteurised products may be preserved for 35 days at a temperature +2°C to 7°C.

**Packaging**

The meals are packed in multi-layered polypropylene food packages; which can be heated in the microwave oven or in saucepan / au bain marie, and are sealed with an easy-peel lid.

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For more information about Acteco, please contact:

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## **Staff**

Today, Tops Foods employs 50 people, working in 3 shifts, five days a week. Because of the highly innovative and automated character of the company, the number of employees is limited, and therefore, every employee has a greater responsibility.

The target turnover per employee is Euro 500.000 and exceptionally high for the Food Industry.

### **Location and export market**

Tops Foods is located in Olen, Belgium, which is a very central location, with the nearby motorway E313 offering easy access to all major European cities.

Tops Foods sells its products in the Benelux countries, France, United Kingdom, Germany, Ireland, Austria, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Greece, Cyprus, Switzerland and Japan.

### **Distinctive features of Tops Foods nv**

Rudy Tops wanted to create a company, which was not an ordinary factory of ready meals. Instead, he wanted to differentiate the company from competitors by using new, innovative technology, namely microwave heat treatment with counter pressure.

The major advantage of microwave heat treatment is that the quality is much better compared to steam sterilisation. Products are heated very quickly which reduces the risk of any loss of quality.

Other advantages are:

- reduced use of energy
- lighter packaging material
- full automatisation
- preservatives are unnecessary because of sterilisation
- care for the environment: because the new technology does not use any water there is no water pollution..

## **Quality**

At Tops Foods quality means:

- taking care of details
- prevention and care as main concern based on HACCP and GMP
- KISS (= Keep It Simple and Stupid): to keep the working methods as simple as possible

Tops Foods is approved in Europe by BRC (British Retail Consortium) and IFS (International Food Standard) "level A and higher level" which is the highest possible certification.

### **Target within Acteco**

Tops Foods became a SME partner in the Acteco project to develop together with the skilled organisations and partners a food package from the substrate of monopolypropylene to be coated with a barrier layer based on the plasma technology with properties similar to the expensive 5 layered EVOH barrier food package which is in use today.

The coating must avoid oxidation and prevent water vapour from entering into the food packaging to the same level of the today's barrier multi-layered tray and should be min. 40 % less expensive.

First industrial tests are being conducted and first results are expected in the course of 2007.