Interview with Marc Antonioli, Marketing Manager, and Betty Groen, Marketing Consultant at Dutch Spices BV

Allergen-safe, worry-free spices

One thing guaranteed to harm a food manufacturer’s business above all else is a succession of product recalls. Almost 70% of recalls are caused by the incorrect labelling of allergens in raw ingredients or blends in the supply chain, an error that can prove extremely costly. Dutch Spices BV produces herbs and spices, primarily for the food industry, and is recognized as a pioneer in outstanding allergen management – correct labelling and the prevention of cross-contamination in production, transport and storage.

A subsidiary of Dutch flavour specialist EPOS, Dutch Spices was founded in 2011 and took allergen management seriously from the outset. "We decided to disconnect from the past, and set up a brand new, allergen-safe production facility," explains Marketing Manager Marc Antonioli. The investment paid off; Dutch Spices was the first company in the world to be awarded the Simply OK European Allergen Information Certification.

"There is an EU regulation relating to 14 allergens," says Marketing Consultant Betty Groen. "We discovered that if we avoid ten additional allergens, almost all consumers with a food allergy can eat our products safely. We avoid 24 allergens, and 95% of consumers with a food allergy are safe. This standard is stricter than the European regulation. Five years ago, we had to do a lot of explaining about allergen-safe products; today others are following our lead."

Dutch Spices specializes in herbs and spices for the industry. It offers over 100 individual herbs and spices, and using these spices the company also produces a wide range of blends which can, for example, be used with water or oil to make marinade, chutney, stock or relish. These are transformed by customers in the food service and processing industries to make seasoned and flavoured products for end consumers. The company also produces a selection of allergen-safe sauces. Highlights of the portfolio include a tasty saté sauce made without peanuts, allergen-safe piri-piri marinade and garlic sauce. While Dutch Spices' products are great news for consumers with food allergies, they offer significant advantages for food manufacturers too. "A product recall is expensive and extremely damaging for our clients, and often faulty allergen management is the cause," notes Ms. Groen. "Our allergen-safe products eliminate that concern. Our allergen management is solid and certified, our flavours are superb and they have a very long shelf life. As an added bonus, all our products are vegan – we have just amended our logo to show this. The demand for vegetarian and vegan products is growing fast." While the food industry in the Netherlands is Dutch Spices' primary customer base, it also sells direct to consumers online and in selected stores in the Netherlands.

Over the next five years, the company is aiming to expand its sales to other European countries. "We are undertaking this expansion step by step," Mr. Antonioli underlines. "Internationalization is quite
complex, and we still have to take certain decisions such as whether to hire our own staff in countries like France and Germany. One thing is clear though; our practice of avoiding 24 recognized allergens is stricter than the European regulation, so we are very well positioned to operate in any EU country.” The retail food market itself is changing, and consumers are increasingly demanding healthy products and developing new eating habits. “Looking into the medium-term future, today’s 20 year olds won’t cook meals,” Ms. Groen sums up. “They will instead eat several healthy snacks a day – larger snacks than we see now – and the industry will focus on developing new products to meet that demand. In 15 years, healthy snacking will be the norm.”