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BENEO invests €50 million in increasing capacity at Wijgmaal rice starch plant

- 50% capacity expansion of production facility in Belgium by 2022 -

BENEO, one of the leading manufacturers of functional ingredients, has announced a 50 percent production capacity increase at its Wijgmaal facility to cater for rising customer demand for its rice starches. A two-stage expansion process valued at €50 million, will lead to increased capacity by March 2022.

BENEO forecasts that the growing demand for natural and clean label products, in applications such as coated confectionery, will intensify in major existing markets, including Europe and the Americas. Rice is widely considered a familiar and recognizable product, with 61% of consumers worldwide regarding rice starch as natural¹, making it the ideal ingredient for the development of products that respond to the increasing trend for clean and clearer labels.

Roland Vanhoegaerden, Operations Managing Director Speciality Rice Ingredients at BENEO notes that the nature of the ingredients business is one of long-term thinking and economic resilience. “We fundamentally believe in the value of this investment, with demand for rice starch coming from both natural and organic growth, as well as from new projects and applications. One of the key reasons for our confidence is the ‘clean label’ trend, where food manufacturers are moving away from artificial additives and replacing them with natural alternatives, such as rice starch.”

Rice starch is capable of filling up all of the micropores on the surface of coatings due to its very fine particle size. This so-called “smoothing effect” is especially beneficial for confectionery manufacturers during the production process, since it ensures a stable result where edges do not crack or splinter. Additionally, rice starch allows for the preservation of a brilliant white colour for months.

Since January 1, 2020, titanium dioxide, which is used to fill microscopic irregularities in coatings, is no longer permitted for use in food products in France. There are expectations that other EU markets may follow the country in banning the additive. “We are already seeing some major

companies looking at rice starch and we will soon have a much larger capacity in place to address this rising demand,” Vanhoegaerden explains.

Technical trials by the BENEIO-Technology Center have shown that clean label rice starch can also play an important role in a variety of other applications including baked goods and products that need to undergo severe processing conditions, such as sauces and dressings, as well as pet food.

The Wijgmaal plant has a proud 160-year history in the area and BENEIO has been significantly investing in the facility in recent years, to make it a frontrunner in sustainability. A recent investment into its docking station means that the company can now accept two barges at its plant, rather than one. As a result, two-thirds of rice raw material is now received by barge and just one-third by truck. “The impact is on cost saving, but also on the environment, due to lower carbon emissions and a reduction in traffic. Our factory is in the middle of an urban area and by increasing barge use, we can reduce congestion and noise levels in the neighbourhood,” Vanhoegaerden explains.

Rice starch production consists of several phases: rice cleaning, soaking, milling, sieving, separation, dewatering, and finally drying. BENEIO’s investment at the Wijgmaal facilities will increase the number of production lines from two to three. The first phase of the BENEIO investment will take place at the tail-end of the production process for existing lines. The installation of a third drier and dewatering line allows the company to reduce bottlenecks and further increase efficiency. The second expansion phase will involve the front-end of the production process, starting from soaking through to the separation of the starch from the proteins in the valorization step.

The facility, which currently employs 180 people, will add up to 20 full-time positions during the course of the expansion, as well as offer further work to maintenance and engineering contractors in the vicinity.

- Ends -

BENEÓ's Wijnmaal plant, formerly known as Remy Industries, is a true hidden champion in the Flanders region. The factory is the source for more than half of the world's rice starch, despite the rice crop being primarily imported from South East Asia. The plant was founded by Edouard Remy in 1856 and remained in family hands until the early 20th century. In the early 1990s, a German investor (Rutgers) installed a completely new starch line in a modernization move that reduced operational costs at Wijnmaal. The Remy plant was indirectly acquired by German-headquartered Südzucker in 2001, through their Raffinerie Tienen operations. It became part of the newly formed BENEÓ Group, when Südzucker founded a new three-pronged ingredients business unit in 2007, together with the legacy Orafiti (Oreye, Belgium) and Palatinin (Mannheim, Germany) businesses.

BENEÓ offers functional ingredients derived from chicory roots, beet sugar, rice and wheat. BENEÓ is the ideal partner to help improve a product in its nutritional and technological characteristics. Key nutritional benefits are 'less fat', 'less sugar', 'less calories', 'added fibre', 'gluten-free' and dairy alternatives as well as energy management, digestive, bone and dental health. Key technological benefits focus on taste and texture improvements. Through a unique chain of expertise, including the BENEÓ-Institute that provides decisive insights into nutrition science and legislation, and the BENEÓ-Technology Center that consults in application technology, BENEÓ actively supports customers in the development of more balanced and healthy food products.

BENEÓ is a division of the Südzucker Group that employs more than 1000 people and has production units in Belgium, Chile, Germany and Italy.

For further information on BENEÓ and its ingredients, please visit: www.beneo.com and www.beneonews.com or follow BENEÓ on Twitter: @_BENEÓ or LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/beneo

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ⁱ HFI Global Trend Study 2018