

ITALY

50 years of Alpie

In the 70's and 80's, Italy was the place to be regarding innovations in mushroom growing and composting and Treviso was the perfect spot for Albino Favero to start creating and supplying machinery for the rapidly evolving mushroom industry, in close contact with customers. 50 years on, the family Favero still continues this legacy.

'Many of our innovations have been co-created with our customers'.

Alpie was founded in 1971 by Albino, who, according to his granddaughter Giulia, was an ambitious and entrepreneurial man with a great passion for mechanics. "Soon, he started working for the mushroom sector that was rapidly evolving at the local level in Treviso province, thanks also to the collaboration with some Dutch advisors that were working in Italy. The very first experience in the sector consisted of building some customized machines for preparing oyster substrate and then we began to be involved also in the agaricus compost production and cultivation. My father Cornelio entered

the company when he was 20 years old, getting his hands dirty in the factory, and allowing him to develop a solid know-how on the machines." In 2011 Davide, his son and mechanical engineer, joined the company and from 2016, Giulia takes care of international sales. Today, she and her brother Davide represent the third generation in the company. "We owe everything to the resourcefulness of our grandfather. He was able to grasp the first signs of the subsequent mechanization of the mushroom industry and, passionate about mechanics, to transform his intuition into work. His first success, my father Cornelio



Alpie factory and offices near Treviso. In 2001 the production facility was expanded by building a new industrial shed that is now entirely dedicated to assembly operations.



Favero family: running the business for three generations. Fltr: Cornelio, his wife Anna (accountancy), Giulia and Davide.



Agaricus compost block lines.



Assembly department recently reorganized according to Lean Production principles.



Cornelio and Davide Favero giving firsthand advice.

often tells us about it, was when the agaricus compost block line he had created – the second ever! – attracted attention and was chosen by a Dutch company. Alpie is very much a family business, and proud of it. “Everyone in the company is directly involved and personally follows projects and people. We can thus be quick in making decisions and pay close attention to the relationship with customers. Indeed we can say that in these 50 years almost all of the solutions developed were born simply by listening to our customers”, concludes Giulia.

Lucky territory

“The company was born in a lucky territory at a lucky time”, according to Cornelio. “In the 1970s, we were lucky enough to live in direct contact with the Italian revolution in the cultivation of mushrooms. A few kilometres from our headquarters, there was Funghi del Montello, a company considered to be at the forefront at an international level. They were the

first in Italy to introduce room ventilation for example. Another large local company we collaborated with, Agrifung, was considered one of the largest compost producer in Europe in the 1980s. Within this company, the world’s first composting system in indoor tunnels was invented, effectively leading to the birth of the modern compost producer.”

Alpie literally grew with the market and started exporting, explains Giulia: “In the 1980s and 1990s, when many mushroom farms had not yet started the mechanization process, the demand for machinery for composting was already high. In those years, my father travelled all around the world – from Australia to Venezuela – to start up what was to be our best seller for years: the agaricus compost block line. This is a very long lasting machine, one of our customers in Spain still works with a model which is 30 years old! Also in those years, we were lucky enough to collaborate on several projects with companies based in the Netherlands, a country that →



E-wash, the new solution for easily cleaning growing racks.

had already successfully introduced mechanized cultivation in mushroom farms.”

New machines and markets

The ever-increasing mechanization taking place in composting facilities has convinced Alpie to expand the range of machinery in this area. Then it was the turn of the machinery for mushroom farms, with the mechanization of the loading operations using the head filling machine, explains Davide. “With this machine, we then managed to strengthen our presence in the Polish market, which had become increasingly competitive and demanding over the years. The machine itself has evolved also thanks to Polish mushroom growers, looking for an ever-increasing yield and product quality. This country has also inspired an ad hoc configuration for cold climates, designed to facilitate the work of operators and guarantee constant performance even in critical weather situations.

Customer at the center

“As mentioned at the beginning, creating relationships with customers is essential for us” says Giulia. “In recent years we have been trying to bring customer attention to another level. If the concept of ‘customer at the center’ translates into technology oriented to time and cost saving solutions, with our approach we have aimed at defining and optimizing new services to meet and often anticipate needs. To give an example, we have noticed that many customers are looking for more technical know-how, in order to make more informed choices. We plan to carry out activities – such as mini webinars held by experts – to be able to share know-how and strategic updates regarding processes, technologies and the mushrooms itself.”

Cornelio agrees: “In the context of industrial machinery, Italy is known for excellence in this sector as much as for food and design. The essence of ‘Made in Italy’ for Alpie translates into attention to detail and almost sartorial personalization. Many of the innovations introduced, in particular for the head filling machine, have been inspired or co-created with our customers. We actively collaborate with some of them to create ‘incremental innovation’, in a continuous search for solutions that do not yet exist.”

The last of the main innovations introduced in recent years is the ‘E-wash’, the first shelf washer in the world, says Cornelio. “Born thanks to an idea of one of our customers – Oriano Borghi, owner of Funghi Valentina – this is the first mechanized system for washing sides and beds of shelves. Since the development of the first prototypes, E-wash has been patented and has already managed to conquer growers in Europe, Asia and America. The reason is to be found in the great revolution it introduces in cleaning of growing rooms: less effort and more safety for operators, but above all an average reduction of the time or manpower required for the operation by 50%.”

Prosecco later

With all the attention on durable products and relationships, Giulia feels sorry that celebrations for the 50th Jubilee had to be postponed due to Covid. “We were thinking of a special event in our wonderful area, that offers many attractions and great food and wine. The pandemic will not allow us to organize it very soon, but we hope to celebrate later, and to make a toast with some good Prosecco together with our clients and collaborators!” 🍷