Heinz Lohmann - Portrait of a Company

Harm Specht, Cuxhaven

Heinz Lohmann was born on 22 July 1901 as son of a cereals merchant. After completing his highschool education in humanities in Hanover and a commercial apprenticeship, he made contacts in the country trading business and the emerging compound feed sector through his father's company. In the 1930s he went to the USA to gain experience of working abroad.

At the age of 30, Heinz Lohmann founded a fish meal factory in Cuxhaven, working in close cooperation with 20-odd medium-sized companies from the fish processing sector. From modest beginnings, this first factory developed throughout the pre-war years and later became a major player in the industry. Commercial activities were put on hold during the Second World War and processing only resumed in 1947.

Once the restrictions imposed on the German fishing fleet were lifted, and when in the early 1950s the small deep-sea fishing industry began to use part of its fleet for seasonal industrial fishing, the Lohmann fish meal processing plant was able to expand accordingly. At times, over 500 tonnes of raw fish were converted to fish meal in a day. When the characteristic odour of fish meal processing was noticed by visitors of Cuxhaven, Heinz Lohmann liked to answer with the Latin proverb "pecunia non olet" (money doesn't smell)!

Even back in the 1960s it was already apparent that future supplies of fish and fish offal would be limited. While consolidating the Cuxhaven operations, Lohmann merged the fish meal processing plant with a second company based in Cuxhaven. In 1982 a major fire destroyed the facilities in Neufelder Straße, but production was continued using another plant in the same part of town (owned by Unilever at the time).

The rising demand for processed agricultural products – particularly milk, meat and eggs – and the growing numbers of agricultural livestock required fish meal to provide protein as part of an effective diet. The shortages of fish meal led to technical solutions to provide alternative sources of protein.

Amino acids were widely used to replace the natural raw materials. Once again, the Lohmann Group was a key player through its subsidiary "Lohmann Tierernährung" (today Lohmann Animal Health).

Lohmann Tierernährung (LTE), Neufelder Straße, Cuxhaven

In the 1950s and 1960s, scientific and practical research into agricultural production methods was nowhere near as advanced as in the US because of the impact of the Second World War. In the US, uninterrupted research had been incredibly successful. For example, scientists had discovered that a fermentation cake containing antibiotics was very beneficial for livestock health and growth. In addition to producing and marketing fish meal, Heinz Lohmann decided to apply for a licence from an American pharmaceutical company to produce vitamin B12 and substrates containing antibiotics using fermentation processes.

The first licensing agreement concluded with the American company Lederle (17 June 1952) allowed the company's patented techniques to be used in Germany. In just 90 days, a large fermentation plant was built in Neufelder Straße in Cuxhaven and soon after Lomacin (Aureomycin) was released for sale. Producing the feed supplement in aseptic conditions was a major challenge for the factory and the staff. By applying expert scientific advice regarding the ingredients for mixed feed and providing a free-of-charge analysis service, Lohmann soon succeeded in generating a great deal of interest within the German mixed feed industry.

This marked the beginning of a new era for agriculture: in addition to the domestic production of agricultural raw materials (e.g. cereals) and traditional fish meal as a source of protein, feed additives were now available which significantly improved animal productivity.

New legislation in the mid-1970s considerably restricted the use of these additives within the EU, but LTE had a well-established sales network and was able to refocus its manufacturing and product range. The successor to LTE, known today as Lohmann Animal Health GmbH und Co. KG, Cuxhaven, Abschnede (LAH), produces and markets all major feed additives (vitamins, technical amino acids, biologics) and poultry vaccines around the world. The company currently has around 300 employees. The large R&D team provides a constant supply of new and innovative products.

Lohmann Tierzucht (LTZ)

Through his contacts in the USA, Heinz Lohmann learned that, in addition to beef, consumer demand for broilers was on the rise. He arranged study trips for his experts to research genetics and production processes in the USA. He saw huge potential for development in Germany. But the first test flocks of “Masthähnchen” – males of traditional egg-type and dual purpose breeds - were hatched, reared and killed in facilities in Oxstedt near Cuxhaven - were anything but successful, and the press people invited to taste the grillers unimpressed.

Heinz Lohmann was not to give up soon and demanded from his staff to explain what was wrong with production in Germany. Hygiene and disease prophylaxis, nutrition, management and the breeds used were variables to work on. The analysis led to the decision to import a “package” of suitable genetic material and know-how from the USA. In 1957, Lohmann concluded a licensing agreement with the American company Nichols, at that time a leading broiler breeder in the USA. Nichols supplied pure-line day-old chicks and sent experts to Germany to set up a modern broiler operation, from breeding to processing.

In 1964, Lohmann acquired the purelines from Nichols to become an independent broiler breeder and to expand international sales. With the acquisition of Indian River in 1978, it was hoped to gain a significant share of the US broiler market, but eventually broiler breeding was divested. Today, Lohmann Indian River broilers are sold by Aviagen.

In 1958, a further licensing agreement was concluded with Heisdorf & Nelson Farms (H&N) for laying hens, a major player in the market for hybrid layers. Art Heisdorf had been a pioneer in introducing “reciprocal recurrent selection” as a new method of cross-breeding in poultry. The commercial layers from this modern breeding system soon became popular in Germany and other countries as “HNL Nick Chick”. Lohmann gradually adapted the genetic material to meet European needs and eventually acquired the pure-lines from H&N.

In 1987, Lohmann was able to buy the company H&N and transferred the H&N breeding program to Cuxhaven in 1997. LTZ and H&N presently have a combined world market share for egg-type chickens between 25 and 30%. Breeding farms in the Cuxhaven area with up-to-date facilities are supplemented with grand parent and test farms on several continents to ensure continued genetic progress and supply to world-wide customers even during times of global disease risks.

As early as 1957-58, Lohmann set up a veterinary laboratory for routine examinations to maximize bio-security for the valuable breeding flocks. Protective vaccination soon was introduced, with vaccines developed from local field isolates. The successor company, LAH, now produces a full range of poultry vaccines using specific-pathogen-free (SPF) eggs in two new plants in Cuxhaven, Abschnede. Valo SPF eggs are needed to cultivate the vaccines: the eggs are free from pathogens and the associated antibodies and are marketed all around the world as SPF eggs for research and vaccine production. Increasing demand has led to the facilities being expanded several times.

Poultry Processing Plant Contifrost, Cuxhaven-Altenwalde

Starting in the mid-1950s, broiler growing was established as a business activity of farmers in the Elbe-Weser region. The first operation was based in a farm in Oxstedt, near Cuxhaven, and soon the

demand exceeded the production potential. In order to meet the growing demand, an old warehouse in Neufelder Straße was converted to a semi-automated slaughter-house. This plant was soon working at full capacity too. The second facility was set up in Präsident-Herwig-Straße with state-of-the-art technology and was able to process 40,000 chickens a day. By the time when a new large-scale plant was built in Cuxhaven-Altenwalde, in 1971, nearly all processing operations were automated. Lohmann's "Goldhähnchen" (golden chickens) – later rebranded WIESENHOF – were sold throughout Germany. Today, WIESENHOF is known across Europe as brand name for quality poultry products.

TAD Pharma

From animal health to drugs for human use: The work in the veterinary laboratory and expertise of the scientists who worked there soon led to the development of a comprehensive range of pharmaceuticals and biologics for poultry. SPF eggs were available for producing in-house vaccines, and in 1968 the TAD Pharma company was founded, which now employs nearly 280 staff. The TAD veterinary department was transferred to LAH in 1996. TAD Pharma now focuses solely on manufacturing and marketing drugs for human use. The company operates state-of-the-art processing plants in Cuxhaven, Abschnede and has grown impressively since it was first created. More than 100 pharmaceutical consultants advise the medical doctors. The company's branded products are well established. A leader among the well-known products is "Harntee 400", a tea to control bladder dysfunction.

Human Nutrition: from Pomps to Nutrilo

The interest of Lohmann in human nutrition may be traced back to the 1940s when the local pharmacist Pomp suggested that Heinz Lohmann should buy and expand a small baby food factory. Pomp provided the recipes and later gave his name to the "Pomps Kindergries" baby food brand. In 1947 the company employed just 4 staff, 3 freelance salesmen and a few trainees. Demand mushroomed and the products captured a significant market share. The company repeatedly expanded to keep up with rising demand and by 1965 sold 1.3 m packets per month, employing 32 people. In 1968, Pomps was sold to the Maizena Group. In 1984, human nutrition interests were reactivated by founding Nutrilo GmbH, Heinz-Lohmann-Straße. Nutrilo focuses on the development and production of vitamin blends for the health food and beverage industry. A significant share of the turnover is allocated to effervescent tablets. Currently Nutrilo employs 60 people.

The entrepreneur Heinz Lohmann

Heinz Lohmann was one of the great pioneers in the European agricultural food industry. As a businessman based in Cuxhaven, he combined a driving force and the will to succeed in a business that was just in its infancy. He soon developed long-term plans for his businesses. He was able to motivate, encourage and challenge his workers and counterparts. Perhaps, occasionally he asked for too much. His standards and methods were unconventional. He was very professional, loved innovation, was willing to take risks and was incredibly dedicated. When he experienced setbacks, his luck always turned and he was able to restructure to stabilise the Group again.

Heinz Lohmann recognized the superior techniques used in the USA before others, and got access to the advanced technology through licensing agreements, which did not require much capital. In the face of considerable opposition from traditional institutions and politicians, he introduced groundbreaking technologies and ensured that the new, better processes were supported by scientific expertise. He also took steps to ensure that developments continued to the present day – a good example of "sustainability".

In 1987, the brothers Wesjohann based in Rechterfeld/Visbek purchased the Lohmann companies in Cuxhaven. Since then, the divisions based in Cuxhaven have expanded considerably with substantial investment to increase the group's long-term productivity. At present, around 700 people are employed in the Cuxhaven area in companies of the former Lohmann Group, now owned by the PHW (Paul-Heinz Wesjohann) or EW (Erich Wesjohann) Group.

In recognition of the contributions made by the pioneer Heinz Lohmann, the current share-holders have created a non-profit foundation named after him. The Heinz-Lohmann-Stiftung GmbH initiates and supports research into food and nutrition of the future. The foundation has already established a reputation through its international conferences. The 6th conference of the Heinz Lohmann Foundation, held May 9th 2006 in Cologne, Germany, was again very well received.

Zusammenfassung

Ausgehend von der Gründung einer Fischmehlfabrik im Jahre 1932 haben sich im Raum Cuxhaven namhafte Firmen entwickelt, die auf Inititiativen von Heinz Lohmann zurückzuführen sind und heute zur PHW- bzw. EW-Gruppe gehören: Lohmann Animal Health (LAH), spezialisiert auf Tierernährung und Tiergesundheit; TAD und NUTRILO, spezialisiert auf Humangesundheit bzw. Humanernährung; sowie Lohmann Tierzucht (LTZ) und H&N, spezialisiert auf Legehennenzüchtung und Produktion von SPF-Eiern für Forschung und Impfstoffherstellung. Die Heinz Lohmann Stiftung beschäftigt sich vorrangig mit Zukunftsfragen der menschlichen Ernährung unter dem Gesichtspunkt intelligenten Ressourceneinsatzes.