



## Pronatec AG opens Swiss cocoa processing plant

Company works with Bühler Group to develop plant.



Pronatec AG has opened a cocoa processing plant in Beringen, Switzerland with equipment from Bühler Group.

Photo from Pronatec and Bühler.

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Pronatec AG, a Swiss supplier of organic food raw materials and of sustainable, organic chocolate, has opened a cocoa processing plant in Beringen in the canton of Schaffhausen.

Pronatec's decision to move cocoa bean processing from external contract processors abroad to Switzerland paved the way for the project, which was implemented with equipment from the Bühler Group.

The Bühler cocoa processing plant, which was designed in close collaboration and coordination with the Pronatec team, offers high quality roasting and grinding of cocoa beans into cocoa

mass and the further processing into cocoa powder and butter.

"The efficiency of the Swiss plant, as well as the design for 100% organic certification, was a priority for Pronatec from the very beginning," says Joachim Essig, head of sales cocoa & malt at Bühler. "Fully integrated automation, small-scale batch production, batch separation, and full traceability were already important topics in the initial discussions in mid-2018, as were gentle handling of the raw materials, food safety, and the highest hygiene standards."

Processes are continuously monitored in the control room, and cocoa products are continuously tested for quality in the company's own laboratory.

"On the one hand, this real-time controlling ensures the taste quality of its products, which is crucial for Pronatec, but it also has a major impact on the energy efficiency of the plant," says Stefan Linder, project director at Bühler. "Pronatec had high requirements for the plant in terms of automation and energy efficiency. For us, meeting these requirements was exciting and a learning curve. Ultimately, all our customers benefit from the new insights."

For more than 45 years, Pronatec has been distributing fair-trade and sustainably produced products for the global food industry and grocery trade. The product range includes cocoa beans, semi-finished cocoa products, couverture, chocolate, sugar, vanilla and spices, all with a variety of organic and fair-trade certifications.

"Pronatec has been providing Swiss chocolate made from organically grown and fair-trade cocoa beans since 1996, and was the first company in the world to offer organic and Fairtrade certified chocolate," says David Yersin, CEO and owner of Pronatec. "In our plant, we are the first company in Switzerland to produce all three organic cocoa semi-finished products – cocoa mass, butter and powder. It is very important that we can maintain proven flavor profiles that we have developed over the years. At the same time, the new roaster also gives us the opportunity to develop new products. The fact that we were able to conduct tests in advance at Bühler's Application and Training Center was a great help in our decision-making process. The proximity to Bühler was a stroke of luck, especially during the corona pandemic. We were and are glad to have a partner at our side just 30 minutes away."

Mandatory requirements for energy efficiency were taken into consideration in the plant design and implementation. For example, in the separation of temperature zones, heat recovery and efficient insulation were installed. Furthermore, emissions were considered from the beginning of the planning process to meet not only all safety requirements but also the highest demands in terms of environmental compatibility. For example, a state-of-the-art exhaust air after-treatment system has been installed to prevent unpleasant odors.

"We are a Swiss company that will produce in Switzerland, with a Swiss machine builder at our side," Yersin says. "As an innovative market leader, after a short evaluation phase, only Bühler came into question for me."

Two core elements of the plant – the Tornado nib roaster and a Nova mill – were manufactured by Bühler in Appenzell, which suited Pronatec's philosophy of quality and

locality.

"For us as an SME, the plant was a big investment," Yersin says. "However, we are already noticing that quality, and the fact that we produce regionally is becoming more and more important to many of our customers. Thus, it is an investment in the future."

Bühler has been active in the cocoa segment for over 50 years and has been continuously expanding its market leadership in this field.

"Especially with smaller plants, the challenge is all the greater," says Daniel Egy, head of business unit chocolate & coffee at Bühler. "In the case of Pronatec, there is also the fact that the plant is located in Switzerland, which means that maximum efficiency is required of it so that the Beringen production site can be successful."

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