

Unimills – as part of Malaysia's Golden Hope group – is at the forefront of promoting sustainability as a basis of its business. Dr Gerhard de Ruiter, Khairudin bin Hashim and Dr Mohd Suria Affandi Yusoff write.

Many European and US consumers feel that improving their health is important since too many of them suffer from obesity and related diseases. These health concerns are driving food manufacturers to eliminate *trans* fats, and increase unsaturated fats, in their products.

Consumers today want foods that are both healthy and tasty but also convenient and natural. In addition, many want functional products based on responsible practices.

Unimills – based in Zwijndrecht, the Netherlands and part of Malaysian plantation giant Golden Hope – finalised its repositioning as a developer of new food concepts based on sustainable vegetable oils and fats last year.

Golden Hope has been at the forefront of formulating and promoting practices that lead to sustainability of its businesses. Significant successes have been achieved, especially in the development of commercially and environmentally sound agricultural practices like integrated pest management, water management, soil conservation practices and adoption of zero burning technique at replanting. A good example of integrated pest management is the use of barn owls to eliminate rats. Other examples of the company's policy of enhancing biodiversity include its establishment of nature reserves and high conservation value forests.

Golden Hope also documents its production activities from the seedling stage, right through to the export of palm oil products, providing its customers with full "track and trace" information.

Golden Hope is one of the founding members of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, which aims to promote environmentally friendly and socially responsible practices in the global supply and use of palm oil (see *OFI*, March 2006).

Innovation

Golden Hope's track record in sustainable palm oil manufacturing is a strong basis for healthy



UNIMILLS' NEW GENERATION OF HEALTHY HARDSTOCKS INCLUDES A NEW RAPESTOCK HARDSTOCK WHICH ALLOWS THE MANUFACTURE OF PURE RAPESEED MARGARINES SUCH AS GOLDINA (PICTURED), SOLD IN GERMANY

Sustainability is base for healthy innovation

innovations of oils and fats.

Food companies increasingly select their ingredient suppliers on their ability to develop new products, their application facilities and expertise.

Product development includes intensive discussions with customers and is driven by regional preferences and cultures. Therefore, new product development activities and application facilities should preferably be available as close to the technical centres of customers as possible.

Unimills has the strong science-based expertise of oils and fat staff inherited from company's Unilever history. A strong collaboration also exists between Unimills scientists, the R&D centre of Golden Hope in Malaysia and external scientists worldwide at universities and research centres.

New product development at Unimills focuses on new formulation of oils, which are co-

developed with customers and jointly tested in application trials.

Bakery trends

The bakery market is one of the biggest food segments in Europe and uses an estimated 2.9M tonne/year of oils and fats. About 40% of the bakery market share consists of butter, and about 20% consists of industrial margarine. More than 100,000 companies are active in this segment in Europe, varying from large industrial bakeries to many artisanal bakeries, especially in the more traditional countries like Germany and France.

From an oils and fats perspective, the bakery market consists of seven main segments: (1) bread improvers (2) cake & pastry (3) chocolate coated and filled biscuits/waffles (4) sweet biscuits (5) plain biscuits (6) waffles and (7) savoury biscuits.

Consumer health concerns are driving the market towards the banning of *trans* fats resulting from the partial hardening of (liquid) oils, and increasing levels of unsaturated fats. Other drivers in the market include:

- Increased use of chocolate in biscuits;
- Supplementation with healthy ingredients such as fibres, seeds, fruits and omega-3 fatty acids;
- Transformation of biscuits into filled/coated biscuits in bar format to eat "on-the-go";
- The growing impact of private labels, which require increased innovation efforts from ingredient suppliers;
- An increased interest in sustainable products initiated by retailers and large multinational consumer food companies.

PHOTOS: GOLDEN HOPE



GOLDEN HOPE HAS DEVELOPED ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES SUCH AS INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT