Time to take up your paintbrush

Belarusian manufacturers of paint materials prepare for WTO competition

By Svetlana Bunko

Domestic products prevail on Belarusian shelves when it comes to varnishes and paints, although various 'ingredients' are imported for our 50 local manufacturers. A further 20-30 deal with imports, which should become easier on Belarus joining the WTO, while our exports will face much stiffer competition. Already, most of the world's powerful brands have representative offices in Belarus.

MAV is implementing a joint project with DuPont Transnational Research Company, explains MAV's First Deputy Director, Vladimir Minko. He notes, "We anticipate the competition from joining the WTO so we aren't simply waiting for the moment. We're already getting ready to compete with Europe's top brands. We really can compete with the best of them, if we work with the best." The Belarusian manufacturer is to gain the right to place the logo of the international company on its products, which are to be tested at DuPont laboratories. Mr. Minko stresses that this shouldn't lead to higher prices for MAV paints however.

DuPont spends over $2bn on research and development annually, with some to be spent on creating products with MAV. "We view the Belarusian market as developing; our growth strategy aims to give us a strong position on emerging markets," emphasises Johan Van den Hemel, in charge of DuPont licensing and branding in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Belarusian specialists are keen to keep abreast of global trends, including the production of 'eco' goods, which are so popular in developed countries. Labelling of products meeting environmental requirements is not only good business sense but would help prevent low-quality products being sold on the Belarusian market. It makes sense to tighten quality requirements, to rid shelves of products containing harmful or dangerous ingredients. Belarus is already moving towards European standards, with quality certification a priority within the Customs Union.

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New production of powder paints at MAV unrivalled in Belarus

Cheese festival in good taste

How much cheese do Belarusians eat? According to official statistics, just 2kg per head annually.

By Vladimir Sobolevsky

Those from Poland and Lithuania consume six times more cheese than Belarusians, while the Greeks and French lead, eating 29kg and 25kg per head annually. Producers say that the average Belarusian eats more than 4kg of cheese each year, including soft, hard and curd cheeses, but, clearly, it does not feature highly in most people's diet. The Director General of Marketing Systems Strategic Development Centre, Anatoly Akantinov stresses that cheese is being promoted in various ways in Belarus, including through the *Minsk Cheese Festival* — to pique local buyers to try domestic cheeses and improve the image of our brands with foreign distributors.

Themed 'food' festivals are long established around the world, with celebrations of beer, cheese, meat and, even, tomatoes. These attract both the press and tourists so it makes sense for Belarus to cultivate its own niche. Steps have already been taken, with the Slavgorod District of the Mogilev Region organising its own cheese festival for local producers. Minsk's major national event will gather all the leading producers, as Mr. Akantinov notes. He adds hopefully, "Next year, our Belarusian cheese festival will be international."

His plan is ambitious but this year's event should show if the idea is feasible. As well as plenty of tasting tables, there will be contests, music, animation, prizes and other entertainments. Appropriately, it's being hosted by the Belarusian State Folk Architecture and Life Museum, located in Ozertso, just 4km from the Minsk ring road. Covering over 150 hectares, the site has enough to keep visitors entertained all day and its folk museum will place the ancient skill of cheese-making in context.

Anatoliy Stetsko, the Director General of Slutsk Cheese Factory, tells us, "In quality our products rival those of Europe." He also has confidence in other cheese making enterprises, which produced over 160 cheese varieties in total. Most follow traditional 'Soviet' recipes — such as 'Russian', 'Dutch' but new cheeses are being launched, using more complex methods and longer curing periods. Affordable yet tasty, these 'elite' cheeses are produced in smaller numbers, making them often difficult to find in the shops.

The first cheese dairies appeared in Novogrudok and Minsk District in the late 19th century, copying Western recipes, as Mr. Stetsko confesses. Cheeses from Sweden, Denmark, New Zealand, Italy and France have been reproduced successfully, making Belarus among the top five dairy producers worldwide.

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Slutsk Cheese Factory goods

No harm to ecology

General plan for Chinese-Belarusian Industrial Park approved

Some time ago, the project for Park construction became open to public discussion, with citizens encouraged to send their written notes and proposals — including on the most rational paths of realisation. Independent professional expertise was given and the planners met everyone interested in the idea.

The First Deputy General Director of the Chinese-Belarusian Company for Industrial Park Development JSC, Kirill Koroteev, notes that the original concept was prepared by Chinese corporations and experienced design institutions. Belarusian specialists have since developed this, with two major goals in mind: the interests of neighbouring settlements, and minimising any negative impact to the environment from construction works. These targets have been met, with a safe ecological regime ensured; in fact, the forests of Volmyansky and Mayak have been preserved, allowing the site to be more beautiful as a result. These protected territories are to be used as landscape-recreational zones (while preserving their existing protective regimes).

Eco-homes are sure to prove popular all over the country

Belarus' first eco-homes built in Dzerzhinsk

Belarusian and foreign companies have united to build eco-friendly detached homes in Belarus, using the latest design solutions and energy saving technologies. Alexander Kucheryavy, an architect on the project (*Belarus' First Multi-Comfortable House*) notes that all standards meet EU eco-certification, using up to four times less energy via heat insulation and other technologies. Each home is designed to stay warm in winter, yet cool in summer, while enjoying good levels of natural light and sound insulation. Materials are also fire resistant and durable.

The design has been several years in the making, although similar homes are found across Europe, the USA and Japan. Mr. Kucheryavy notes that the increased building costs involved are recouped within a reasonable period through energy saving, making the design one which Belarus hopes to replicate countrywide. The homes are sure to prove popular with the public although Mr. Kucheryavy stresses that market demand will be the deciding factor. He adds, "Our task is to find a balance between comfort and building cost. However, I'm convinced that demand will be forthcoming for these homes and for energy-saving construction materials in general. The public are paying no more than 30 percent of the real cost of housing but this is gradually rising." The eco-homes are thought to be beneficial to health, especially since they have 5-10 times more natural lighting than the countrywide average.