

[&]

**VNK**

*In this issue*

- **BELGIUM!**

*& further*

- **LEO PEETERS**
- **COMMON SORREL**
- **LYOBEL**
- **FREEZE DRYING IN THE PICTURE**

## PREFACE



VNK has been expanding its activities for years now. As you all know, not only in the Netherlands but also abroad. As you might have heard, we acquired the company Lyobel in Hulshout, Belgium, this spring. This acquisition took up a lot of time and energy and we are very happy that it succeeded. Now, we can continue the freeze-drying activities in Belgium. For VNK, this acquisition is a welcome expansion of our selection of air-dried herbs with deep-frozen and freeze-dried herbs. Our position as market leader in the Benelux has been strengthened. VNK already had a longstanding relation with Lyobel. A large quantity of the herbs processed in Belgium was cultivated in the Netherlands by VNK. With the take over of Lyobel, the board of commissioners of VNK is strengthened with mister Ton Lammers (CFO of Vion).

This issue of & will deal with the activities in Belgium. This way, we would like to welcome our Southern colleagues. This is the reason why the star of in the Picture is Lyobel. This is a means to get to know our new company. We also take a closer look at the typical Belgium herb common sorrel and you will get a better Insight into Leo Peeters, the works manager of VNK/Lyobel BVBA. In VNK in development, we will give you all the details of our partnership with and finally our take over of Lyobel.

As every year, the Flevopenningen were awarded. VNK was nominated for an award in the category of most innovative company in Flevoland. You will read more on this. And of course, we will give you the latest news from the market. This issue of & can also be read on the Internet. Via <http://www.vnk-herbs.nl/nieuws.html> you can download a PDF-file. And keep a watchful eye on our website. A lot of work is being done to renew our website. As always, you can contact use or our editors if you have any question regarding VNK or the subjects in this issue of &. Have a nice time reading.

*Bauke van der Veen*  
*Director VNK BV*

## VNK IN DEVELOPMENT



It is clear that VNK is developing. Besides a new location and a new corporate identity, we also expanded our activities abroad. And not only to sell our products. We explicitly have developed new activities in other countries. Our joint venture B&V Herbs in Bulgaria is one of many fine examples.

Also closer to home, just over the border, VNK has been active for several years. We already worked together with Lyobel in Belgium for some time and for a while there was talk of a merger between the two companies. That did not happen. Unfortunately, Lyobel nearly went bankrupt due to disappointing results. A take over by VNK was the best solution.

The company from Hulshout is specialised in deep-frozen and freeze-drying herbs. And with the acquisition of Lyobel, VNK has created the possibility to expand its drying capacity significantly. With Lyobel in our company, we now have three different conservation methods. This has strengthened our position in the market.

In Biddinghuizen, the months in winter and spring were used to increase the drying capacity significantly. Because of this we are able to process more aromatic herbs during the summer. The demand for our cultivated and dried herbs is so big, that we will have to increase our capacity again. This way, we can anticipate on the increasing demand of herbs in the market.

At the moment, an organisational change in the main office is being prepared. With this change, we can capitalize growth possibilities in the future. For instance, the Management Team will be expanded and the production activities will be placed in independent working companies. The commercial and the general (supporting) activities will be placed in the Dutch holding.

From the beginning of May, a lot of work has been done to prepare the deep-freeze and freeze-drying activities in Belgium. We will try to process herbs from the harvest of 2007 as much as possible.

In Bulgaria, we are organising the establishment of a producer organisation (P.O.). This P.O. is similar to our Dutch cultivator cooperative. Just in the Netherlands, we want to promote the cultivation of herbs with this cooperative. It is very important for our joint-venture B&V-herbs, that the local farmers start cultivating herbs. At the moment cultivation is only limited to the fields we rent ourselves.

## **FREEZE-DRYING IN THE PICTURE**

**With Lyobel as new business unit of VNK, we have acquired another drying method: Freeze-drying. How does this work? Here the method of freeze-drying is explained in word and in images.**

Freeze-drying is an industrial method that has been used to conserve edibles and medicines. The principle of freeze-drying is that through low temperatures (minus 30 or 40 degrees Celsius) the water molecules are being absorbed into ice-crystals. This way, the air will become extremely dry and water will be extracted from the product. This process is based on sublimation: direct transition from solid matter to vapour. Freeze-drying edibles preserves the taste better, reduces the volume and weight of the product and the product can be kept longer. An other great advantage of freeze-drying is the fact that micro-organisms, like bacteria, cannot live in an atmosphere without water. This way, the product is being preserved better. Freeze-dried products are: soups, tea and instant coffee.



*1. VNK/Lyobel in Hulshout.*



*2. The Freeze-drying factory.*



*3. The cold storage for the deep-frozen herbs.*



*4. Room with a freeze-drying unit.*



*5. An open freeze-drying unit.*

## **IN THE PICTURE... LYOBEL**

**VNK has taken over Lyobel. This you will already know. What you might not know is: what does Lyobel do and why did VNK acquire this company? & did some research and will get you acquainted with a friendly company from Belgium that has worked together with VNK for several years.**

Since ancient times, people have used aromatic herbs. Fresh herbs have always been preferred. Preservation techniques like deepfreeze, freeze-drying and air drying are the solution for the limited availability of fresh herbs and have served the users.

### **Establishment**

This is what Jos Verbeeck also thought. He literally started from his garage with the freeze-drying of onions. He had developed his own freeze-dryer. From small scale production at home, it developed via Mechelen and a freeze-drying unit in Boortmeerbeek, where Lyobel was established in 1989, into a company specialised in deepfreeze and freeze-drying herbs. In 1993, the company moved to Hulshout. The company settled in a former abattoir for chickens in 1993. On this location, now stand nineteen self developed freeze-drying units. Lyobel became the largest freeze-drier of herbs in Europe.

At first, Lyobel only processed fresh herbs. But the availability of fresh products is limited. To increase the load of the freeze-drying units, Lyobel also started processing deep-frozen products. As side effect, the company also developed a market for deep-frozen products.

### **Clients**

The clients of frozen products have high standards for quality and these products are being used as ingredients for dried meals, soups and for small packages for consumers or large scale consumers like hotels and restaurants. The deep-frozen products find their way to the food industry and the catering. In the last couple of years, Lyobel has gained a lot of experience in the processing of a large variety of products. Besides herbs and vegetables, it has also processed fruits and fish products.

### **Cooperation**

The cooperation between VNK and Lyobel dates back from 1994. VNK has supplied fresh herbs for the freeze-drying units since that time. Later the products were first frozen before part of the load was used in the freeze-drying unit. In the early years, our farmers packed the product in boxes. Later it was transported in containers. The main product is parsley. Also products like chervil, celery, coriander, thyme, basil, garden-cress and lovage were supplied.

### **Market leader**

Since that time, VNK has developed into a market oriented company, where the wishes of the customers are central to the organisation. Improvements in efficiency and quality of the product and the production process, calls for new investments. The Dutch herb cultivation greatly benefits of the new marketing possibilities and the profitable processing of herbs. The investment policy of VNK is focussed on this. It was a good decision of VNK to take over Lyobel and acquire all facets of the processing of herbs and become a market leader.

### **Transparency**

Due to transparency, clients are asking more of producers. Lyobel and VNK are at the beginning of the production chain. A purchaser expects that the person he is talking to, knows what he is talking about. Tracing and tracking of products is important and is becoming increasingly more so. Control of the whole production chain is a point of interest for VNK. Because VNK manages the whole cultivation chain, the steps in this process are transparent for all stakeholders (governments and clients). That this management system has

worked has been proven over the last couple of years. For VNK, this has also been the reason why we have initiated different projects in countries of origin like Bulgaria. Products are being cultivated and processed the same way as in the Netherlands. This is becoming increasingly important in the markets for medicinal and aromatic herbs.

### **Niche**

The combination Lyobel/VNK wants to take an important position in the market. Both companies have a lot of knowledge. Because the herb sector will always be a niche market, this knowledge cannot easily be acquired from third parties. We can learn much from each other. In both companies, young, highly trained and ambitious people work and they are willing to take up the new challenges that face the organisation.

### **The advantages of the take over for both companies:**

- Our selections of herbs complement each other and we have the same clients.
- Together we manage a large part of the whole production chain (from seed to end user (=industry/ store chain)).
- Two companies with a lot of knowledge and infrastructure.
- An important position in the market can be acquired.
- Possibilities to increase cultivation by specialising in several products with higher volumes.



## INSIGHT



As a customer of VNK, you regularly are in contact with us. You have met several of our employees because they visited you. But for the most part you do not see us. Our service is realised without you seeing all the activities. One telephone call to VNK is enough to give you all the service we agreed on with you. Nevertheless it is nice to know the face behind the voice of the person you regularly have contact with and who delivers the excellent and optimal service you have come to depend on. In this feature one of the faces behind VNK will give an insight in himself.

*Name: Leo Peeters Age: 43*

*Position: Manager VNK/LYOBEL BVBA*

### ‘WE WILL BE RUNNING AGAIN AS NEVER SEEN BEFORE’

From 1996 to the beginning of 2007, he was production manager, environmental coordinator and prevention advisor with Elitec NV in Hulshout. Like Lyobel, this daughter company was declared bankrupt. Lucky for him and for the company, Lyobel will start up again as Daughter Company of VNK and he can start working again for this freeze-drying company in Belgium. Since May 2007, Leo Peeters is works manager of VNK/Lyobel BVBA.

“I was, and still am, very glad with VNK. With this company, there is an influx of people who know what they want and who will do everything to get things started. The last couple of years, the company did not invest a lot and could not accommodate the increasing demand of our customers. And that was a shame, because customers had to go somewhere else because of the long waiting periods. Lyobel did not survive. But luckily VNK came. And I know now the company will survive!”

“Eleven years ago, my cousin introduced me into Lyobel and I became a production manager. Now I am the works manager. I do not want to call myself that. I am just responsible for the production. And that feels good.”

“I was very happy when Bauke van der Veen asked me to become works manager of VNK/Lyobel. The company is like my baby. I was involved with the company from the start in 1997 and now I can assist with the re-start of the company. Great! I had already accepted another job after the bankruptcy. When Bauke asked me to come back, I did not have to think long. I quite my new job and started working again for my big love. Even though I have to travel further and have longer working hours. But I am not stuck on office hours, especially if I can help my company tot start up again.”

“And we are working hard to get VNK/Lyobel running again as soon as possible. The customers are also getting ready. We are only waiting for several machines. But progress is steady. Very soon, we will start up the freeze-drying units and when the deepfreeze units are ready, we will be running full swing in October. And we will succeed. Of all the people who worked in the company before the bankruptcy, only five people remain. When we are running at full capacity, we will be working with the same amount of people again. I hope, and also expect, that this will be a success story.”

## CULTIVATION IN THE PICTURE

GB: Common Sorrel FR: Oseille Lat: *Rumex acetosa*

### What is common sorrel

We also know common sorrel as sour dock. The plant can grow up to a metre high and can be found near nettles. There are a lot of known varieties of sorrel. The seeds are sown from May till July/August and this is being done every year. Two months after sowing, as the plant has about six leaves, it can be harvested. The crop can be eaten like spinach.

The plant contains a lot of vitamin C, purifies the blood and stimulates appetite. Just like rhubarb, common sorrel is a Polygonaceace (knotweed). The plant is a perennial herb so the crop can be harvested several years. The stamens and the pistils are on different plants; this means that plants are either male or female.

### Where do we find common sorrel

Common sorrel grows along roadsides, in meadows and on rough terrain. It is also cultivated and used in the kitchen. In Belgium, common sorrel is cultivated south of Gent.

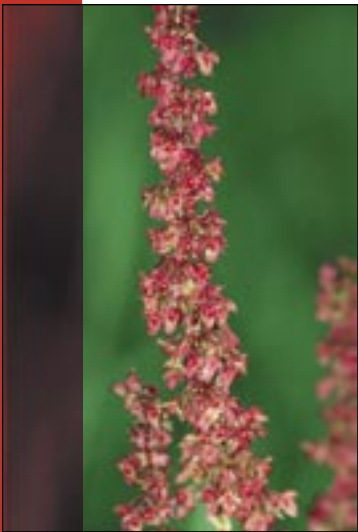
### What does common sorrel look like

Often and especially in sunny places, parts of the plant are red. When the plant grows in open areas in the forest, it has a green colour. Common sorrel has oblong leaves. The plant will grow up to 60 centimetres or one metre. In May- June, the plant will flower. In principle the plant is androgynous, but in some cases it can also be diclinous. The colour of the flowers is reddish or brown reddish. When dried the flowers are rust-coloured. In a bouquet of field flowers, you can find common sorrel. The seed has the shape of a triangle. The seeds look like it has wings.

### What is the taste of common sorrel and what can it be used for

The ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans gathered common sorrel as an herb. Oxalic acid is the reason for the sour taste of the plant. This substance is also found in rhubarb and apples. When you eat a lot of common sorrel, there is a big chance little stones with calcium oxalic are formed. This is harmful for the kidney (kidney stones). Oxalic acid binds itself with calcium already in the body. This is the reason why the plant must not be eaten a lot. Most animals avoid the plant.

But it is eaten by people. Sometimes people chew the stem because it is juicy and sour. The leaves are used for salads, soups and the preparation of sauces. The plant also contains a lot of ascorbic acid. Apparently Spanish sorrel (*Rumex scutatus*) is the best for preparing several dishes. For example in France, sorrel soup is still part of the haute cuisine. It taste like lemon and contains lots of vitamin C. Therefore, sorrel was used to prevent scurvy in the past. The sorrel leaves can be used in a salad or prepared like spinach. Also they can be used in a clear soup. When prepared like porridge with currants and raisins, it is considered a delicacy. Young sorrel taste the best. The juice of common sorrel can also be used to soften the pain caused by nettles.



### **What does VNK do with common sorrel?**

VNK cultivates this product so that it can be processed in Belgium when asked by the deepfreeze industry (mostly deepfreeze and sometimes freeze-drying). The main market of the product is France.

## **How do we eat common sorrel**

### **Common sorrel-nettle soup**

Puree cream soup. This is an old dish from Belgium. It can be made in twenty to thirty minutes.

#### **Ingredients:**

- 1 onion (cut finely)
- Mixed soup vegetables
- 1 spoon of vegetable oil
- 200g nettles
- 200g common sorrel
- 1 laurel leaf
- litre vegetable broth
- Salt, pepper and gated nutmeg
- 2 spoons of sour cream

#### **Preparation:**

First wash the soup vegetables and cut them in small pieces. Wash the nettles and the common sorrel and remove the bad leaves. Braise the vegetables and the onion in a little bit of oil. Add the nettles, sorrel and the laurel leaf. After that add the broth and cook everything for 10 to 15 minutes on a low fire. Flavour the soup with some nutmeg. Remove the laurel leaf and mash the vegetables in a mixer. Take the pan from the fire and stir the cream into the mashed vegetables. Heat the soup, without boiling and serve the soup hot.

#### **Other edible facts over common sorrel:**

- The leaf of the sorrel can be used tot curdle milk.
- Salads with common sorrel are fresh and can be eaten with lamb and beef dishes or with smoked salmon.
- A dressing with sorrel for a poached salmon:  
melt 100 grams of butter. Add cut sorrel and cook slowly. Take the pan of the fire and add 300 ml of cream or crème fraîche. Put the pan on the fire again and cook slowly. Flavour with some salt.

## & NEWS

### SECOND PRICE FOR VNK AT THE FLEVOPENNINGGALA (FOTO'S)

At the beginning of the year, VNK was awarded with the second price for most innovative company in Flevoland. The price was presented at the yearly Flevopenninggala that was organised by the Stichting Flevopenningen. Winner in the category Most Innovative Company was Ferdar Automation Systems B.V., a robotic company from Almere.



### CULTIVATION OF THE HERBS ON THE INTERNET

What is the condition of the herbs? Which herbs are being cultivated? Which are being harvested? To answer these questions and to make it easy, we now publicise pictures of the herbs on our website. You can follow the harvest and cultivation of the herbs.



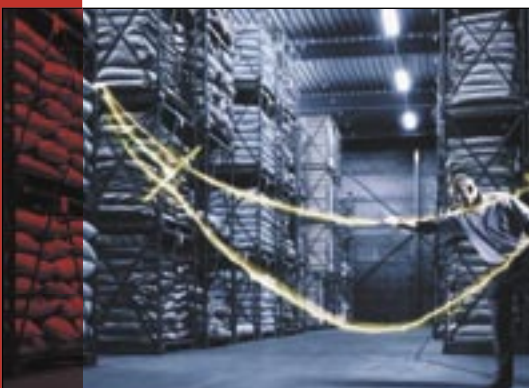
### UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Keep a watchful eye on our website! As you know, VNK is going through some changes and one of these changes is a new website. Soon the renewed website will go online. We hope that with our new website, we can facilitate you even better.



### VNK ON EXHIBITION IN LONDON

From October 30 till November 1 2007, VNK will present itself at the Food Ingredients Exhibition in London. This exhibition takes place every two years and brings together the important food producers of Europe.



### PHOTOGRAPH IN THE BROCHURE OF ELECTRABEL

VNK gets its electricity from Electrabel Netherlands in Zwolle. As a customer, VNK, in the person of Bauke van der Veen, was asked to cooperate with this energy company to make a business brochure. This nice picture is the end result.

*Bauke van der Veen shots with fire in the stockroom*

### VNK COLLEAGUE IN RENAULT 4 TO MOROCCO (FOTO)

Together with a friend, Côme De Villelume, he drove in an old Renault 4 from Paris to Morocco: Côme Couty works in VNK and he participated in this journey with some hundred other R4's to bring school supplies to the children.



The so-called '4LTrophy' combines sports with humanitarian aid. Since 1996, the rally takes place every year and several teams bring these school supplies from Paris to Morocco in a Renault 4. Objective is to help the children in Morocco who go to school. VNK was one of the sponsors of this project.

In the next issue of &, more on this rally to one of the countries where VNK gets its herbs from.

#### DOWNLOAD THE NEWSLETTER AS PDF

Of course, this & is also available online. Just look on [www.vnk-herbs.nl](http://www.vnk-herbs.nl).

## & FURTHER

#### BRITISH HERB SUPPLIERS START A MARKETING CAMPAIGN

Five of the largest suppliers of herbs in Britain, R&G, HumberVHG, Lighthorne Herbs, Scotherbs and Swedeponic, will start a marketing campaign on fresh herbs. These five companies supply ninety percent of the herbs in Great Britain. With this campaign, the companies want to increase awareness of fresh herbs in Britain and increase the sales of fresh herbs. In the campaign, the health benefits of fresh herbs are emphasised. An important part of the campaign is increasing knowledge with consumers on how to prepare fresh herbs. (Source: [ww.agf.nl](http://ww.agf.nl))

#### CHINESE HERBS CAN CAUSE CANCER

A group of preparations of herbs used in the traditional Chinese medicine can contain aristolochia acid. This poisonous substance harms the kidney and can cause cancer even in small quantities. A warning was issued by the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (VWA). The Authority advises to avoid this poisonous substance in the traditional Chinese preparations.

The VWA investigated 68 risky herb preparations over the last five years. In 25 preparations aristolochia acid was found. In the nineties about seventy people got severe kidney problems and in a lot of cases also cancer due to the aristolochia acid in a slimming product.

The website of the VWA mentions the names of the products that contain these substances. Some Chinese remedies which are used to expel moist, contain Aristolochia acid. It is forbidden to sell products with aristolochia acid since 2001. Due to small-scale import and trading via the Internet, these herb preparations find their way on the market.

#### & A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE CANNOT HURT

Do you know the difference between herbs and spices? Herbs are green plants or leaves of these plants with a spicy but not a hot taste. Most of the plants grow in the Mediterranean countries and further north. Fresh herbs can be bought in the summer. Spices originate from different parts of a plant or tree that grow in the (sub) tropics. Spices can be seeds (anise), fruits (pepper), flower buds (nutmeg) or rhizomes (ginger). Nowadays, fresh herbs can be bought throughout the year. Some in a bundle (parsley, basil) and others in a pot (chives).

## VACANCIES

**VNK is looking for people! For several business units within our company, we are looking for new colleagues.**

For instance, we need people to help our **secretariat** and **administration**, a **mechanic**, an **engine driver** for our **mower** and a **Manager Operations**.

For our location in **Belgium**, we will also need good and motivated people to help with the deepfreeze and freeze-drying activities.

### ***Interested?***

Look on our website or contact us. You can find our address on the back of this newsletter.

## Colophon

& is a publication of VNK BV and is intended for customers and other external contacts of VNK.

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