



Food for Thought

Talios Invest is developing and strengthening innovative food businesses in the European market with a focus on sustainability and profitability.

Images courtesy of Talios Invest

Talios Invest has a range of strong, sustainable food businesses in its group with the company investing and developing in successful businesses like Tage Lindblom, Mantorp, and Ostspecialisten.

The CEO Magazine sat down with Dennis Bohm, CEO of Talios Invest, to discuss the evolution of the company and the transformation of the brands and companies under its wings.

***The CEO Magazine:* What inspired you to establish Talios Invest?**

Dennis: It all started in 2001 when I bought a cheese business. I worked with a company for eight years before I got the opportunity to buy another company that focused on food service. It was much bigger and the deal involved a lot more money. Talios Invest was invented in order to be able to create a group of companies. I would use Talios Invest to buy other companies, to get an interesting mix of companies that could work together.

What do you think have been the greatest achievements you’ve seen as Talios has developed?

After a large acquisition, we’ve increased our turnover by more than \$100 million. We’ve also been able to keep our clients happy. We’ve invented a new way of packaging because a lot of the products we work with are generic products like cheese, tomatoes, beans, and so forth—you can buy them almost anywhere.

When it comes to competition, quality is obviously one part, but packaging plays an interesting role today as well with people focusing more and more on environmental issues. We have been able to be in front in that area. Together with one of our partners we have a new, very interesting way of packaging. Instead of using a can, we use bags with the same function. That’s one thing that I’m fairly proud of as it’s much better for the environment.

To be able to develop the companies under the Talios Invest umbrella and to make them work effectively is an achievement that I’m really proud of. I want to make sure we retain staff, make them

want to stay, and of course, increase the turnover.

How do you communicate with your employees and encourage innovation in your companies?

I would say there’s not much distance between the companies under Talios Invest. I have meetings with those companies and they see me every week. I have meetings with all the employees every week. That’s very important; to be seen. The staff need to feel like you’re present and that you are interested in them and the business. I do travel a lot but it’s very important for me to be in the middle of these companies so people feel that they can approach me and talk to me. I think I’m quite a good listener and I think my employees feel that they can talk to me about anything.

Two of the companies I run are production companies so we buy cheese from all over Europe and we pack them in a factory I have and sell them to different retail stores and chains. Another company I have produces wet salads based on mayonnaise. We also do some slicing of ham and ›

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that the staff feel safe at Talios; they know that the companies we own are old and well-established. One is 90 years old, another 40, and another 20, so I think that gives them a sense of security.

Also, I think that they have the feeling that someone is listening to them. If they have something that they would like to change, my door is always open. It's very easy to have fast and open communication. If they come to me and communicate their idea I could make a decision in two seconds or two minutes. We're very flexible.

How do you work with suppliers and strategic partners to ensure Talios' consistent high-quality standards?

I have a very skilled purchasing manager who is very good at what she does. She's responsible for how we develop the communication with our suppliers. Of course, I'm also very involved

other products. The questions you find in a production company are not always the same as you would find in a wholesaler. The questions are different but it's very important to take all of them seriously. People need to know that you're there and you're interested in their questions and concerns. If I look at the people I work with, most of

them have been there for many, many years.

What do you think is the secret behind Talios' high staff retention?

I don't know if I'm the right person to answer a question like that. Of course, if I could guess, it might be

in this. We have meetings every year with all our suppliers. We've been working on our corporate social responsibility for some years now. We have our own conduct code. We've been visiting all of the plants that we work with.

We show that we're interested and we build relationships with them. Some of them are now our friends. We question what they do, we want them to improve, and we want to improve with them. We're not here to reinvent the wheel but we just try to find new, functional ways to sell our products. A good price, good quality, and good packaging. We are really involved in developing the products we buy from our suppliers.

What did it mean to you when you were named Ernst & Young's Entrepreneur of the Year?

I honestly don't like to be seen like that. That's not how I work. For me, it's much better if the staff are recognised. When they

asked me to participate in that, I said no two or three times. When they asked me the third or the fourth time I said yes, and of course once I agreed, I wanted to win [laughs].

It's definitely a nice achievement but it doesn't affect the whole world. I'm definitely proud. It's my staff who are doing the daily work. I'm just there to give them goals and let them know where we're heading. I'm old enough to know that that's how it works. To get an achievement like this, of course it's nice but it's not my achievement—it's an achievement for the people who work with me.

Where do you see Talios Invest and the industry going in the future?

Our management team, together with all our staff, created a strategic plan to lead us from 2012 to 2016. Already, we have been forced to change it because things are changing all the time. I would

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like to see us growing in Sweden with new products and new, interesting ways of packaging. We're also looking at other countries like Denmark, Norway, and Finland.

I'm also involved separately with a project in Africa. I'm a friend of the Mandela family and through them I was asked to participate in a milk project in Ghana so I've been there a few times now and we'll see what happens. Of course, if we can help people to get better food and milk then that's something that I would like to do.

Additionally, a few years ago we were accredited as a supplier to the World Food Program for the United Nations. That's also something that I would like to increase and work more with. •

"We are honoured to supply Talios Invest for more than 20 years, an innovative company in the Swedish food sector. Everyday it is a joy working with this professional, dedicated, and friendly team and makes doing business worthwhile and satisfying." - Mr. Mark Verkleij, Managing Director, Vepo Cheese



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