

Totem Food: the art of freezing the cheeses of the Apulian dairy tradition

Totem Food is an entity that stands out in the dairy sector for its dedication not only in production but also in the freezing of items that it sells widely in foreign markets. The company is committed to research and the development of innovations - in fact, there is no lack of collaborations with universities and research institutes - while maintaining the roots of tradition. Sustainability is a theme dear to Totem Food, which aims to make choices aimed at green solutions, respecting the environment and respecting health protection regulations, opting for quality raw materials. Nicola Basile, managing director of the company, analyzed point by point the aspects that distinguish Totem Food from other players in the sector.

When we talk about cheeses, we imagine a fresh, seasoned product, certainly not frozen, which is a very interesting novelty and one that sets you apart. What is your trade secret?

Totem food was the first company to develop and implement a project aimed at freezing burrata and not without difficulty, since, in a country like ours, a producer of very good cheeses, no one had considered the possibility of freezing them. This constitutes a distinctive



Nicola Basile, CEO Totem Food

element that we are proud of because it has actually expanded the possibility of exporting these products, with a series of advantages hitherto unknown. I refer in particular to those cheeses subject to easy deterioration, such as burrata and mozzarella, whose export to distant countries posed problems that were difficult to solve. Freezing becomes the ideal solution for overcoming distances, therefore capable of guaranteeing good product quality, considerable savings in transport costs, and the possibility

of conveniently managing products, avoiding waste. What distinguishes us is the strong passion for innovations and particular attention to the quality of our products that we strive to improve every day to meet the expectations of an increasingly demanding market. Rather than trade secrets, we must speak of know-how that we have developed through studies and research, also making use of the collaboration of the University of Basilicata and researchers from the University of Portici. From the beginning, the goal was to overcome the difficulties posed by the freezing of creamy cheeses such as burrata, stracciatella, and mascarpone, especially concerning the final result. That is, to be able to obtain a good creaminess, which with normal freezing techniques could not be reached. This is our secret, a know-how developed with passion and tenacity that overcoming the difficulties has given these products a new way of being used, without sacrificing quality. With our product know-how, all of this is now feasible, as our products after defrosting offer the creaminess we were looking for.

What is your assortment?

Over the years, the range of our products has progressively expanded, intending to face an international market increasingly interested in the frozen cheese sector. The burrata, a symbolic product of this new trend, was joined by many other products of our dairy tradition with particular attention to the more perishable ones.

Can you tell us how your adventure in the world of frozen cheese began?

Our adventure in the world of freezing began almost by chance. Totem Food started taking its first steps in the dairy sector several years ago. However, our entry into the world of freezing is quite recent. In 2008, something happened that shifted our gaze towards this new sector.



Traveling, we realize how much Italian cuisine and its products are appreciated globally, makes us feel proud and makes us want to let everyone know about our delicacies. However, the products called to represent our Italian spirit must be able to guarantee its quality in every part of the world. Hence the desire to find a solution to facilitate the export of these products, without their integrity being compromised by transport times. The company has turned its attention to one product, particularly the burrata, which we all know is a very good product and much-coveted abroad but unfortunately easily perishable and therefore not easy to export. We thought of freezing it, regardless of the pessimism expressed by those who argued that this operation was impossible, considering it an idea doomed to failure. The project took shape and became, after an experimentation phase, a certainty. The goal achieved immediately showed its positive sides. It was decided to present the frozen burrata for the first time at SIAL in Paris in 2012. During this occasion, our product was chosen as an innovative product, attracting



the interest of Japanese buyers present at the fair, who, as we know, are very attentive to the innovations and quality of our products. From that moment on, frozen burrata has gradually conquered the Japanese market, and its demand is constantly expanding. Today we are proud to say that the freezing of burrata has marked the birth of a new market sector, opening the doors of export to frozen cheeses like other products. Over the years, Totem Food has consolidated its experience in the field of cheese freezing, dedicating itself to the search for other innovative solutions, managing to expand the range of its products gradually.

How important is the export market for you?

The distance from foreign markets is a determining factor for the growth of interest in our products. Our volume of business is expressed 100% abroad, mainly towards the Asian and North American markets, with a good 30% expanding in the countries of the Union. The export market today represents for us the only reality to which we prefer. We aim to grow further

with the gradual introduction of new products that we have in the testing phase. As for the national market, we do not exclude that it may, sooner or later, discover the advantages related to the use of some frozen products, especially in the Ho.Re.Ca sector.

What are your flagship products?

Burrata is our most requested product and therefore remains our flagship product, to which we have recently combined very interesting variants that are giving excellent results. Obviously, in addition to this, we focus on the whole range of our creamy cheeses, which represents our strength and aims to conquer a more quality-oriented market, such as straciatella, mascarpone, and a new range of spreads.

What are the countries with which you have established stable and successful trade relations?

Japan is the country that immediately understood the novelty and usefulness of our frozen cheeses,

especially burrata, and it is thanks to this product that we immediately established excellent commercial relations. We are very proud of this report, considering that the Japanese are very attentive to the quality of Italian products. Having therefore established stable relations with this country has in a certain sense confirmed the goodness of our products. Subsequently, our exports also expanded to other Asian countries such as South Korea, China and partly to the United States and South America. Lately, we

have been gaining an interesting market share in Eastern Europe.

To conclude, I would just like to say that the freezing of fresh cheeses represents the future for exports and is destined to grow and occupy an increasingly important role in a globalized market. Only by extending the shelf life of these products will it be possible to reach every part of the world, and we are continuing to work in this direction to be at our best.

