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We speak to Mr. Jacek Wolkowicz, President of AGROSİK Co., laureate of Leading Polish Exporter Award and Master of Export of Food Products Award.

Editor: Mr. President, first of all I would like to congratulate you on the occasion of being awarded with the prestigious Leading Polish Exporter Award. Could you tell us, please, the reasons why your Company was acknowledged with this Award?

Mr. Wołkowicz: An Award accompanied by a Title “The Leading Polish Exporter” was received by our company in 2006, in acknowledgement of our many years of work on development of export of Polish food in the category “All Natural”. This prestigious award was presented to us by the Vice- Prime Minister of Polish government in the historical rooms

of The Wilanow Palais during the full-dress Exporter Gala event organized by the National Chamber of Commerce.

On the other hand, one of our new products – fruit preserves made of 100% fruits with no sugar added – (10 flavors) – received a special distinction called “Master of Export of Food Products 2006” by the Minister of Economy during the POLAGRA Food Fair 2006.

E.: What is the basic incentives of AGROSİK Company?

W.: First of all we are specializing in export of food products, especially within the category “All Natural”. Since we established our company we are focusing on development of our basic product line which is fruit and vegetable preserves, with a growing number of varieties year by year. Actually we represent over 30-years of experience in export activity on that field. We are also manufacturing products under own trademark AGROSİK. Our production goals are implementing of the top quality based on natural resources only. One of the last achievements we are proud of is to introduce to the Australian customers a horseradish with a very strong organoleptic features. Just for the US market we developed next “all natural” product – white cabbage leaves, pickled and pasteurized. It is designated for

all restaurants and restaurateurs, including vegetarian, interested in creation of a new taste in more or less common food like meet or veggie stuffed cabbage rolls (traditional German and Polish specialty). Our distributors just started to supply Manhattan restaurants where it was immediately acclaimed a culinary hit of Winter 2006/07.

E.: The post-transformation changes gave individuals a chance to develop an own business and widely opened the world market for (Polish) entrepreneurs are not 30 years old. How you get to such long-term experience mentioned by you?

W.: When I started in the mid 70ties my work for the Foreign Trade Enterprise AGROS I was in charge of an export of Polish foodstuffs to the free market countries of Western World. It was a very good school of doing business, I can even call it a “university” of trade, where I learned how to do operations, organize supply chains, work with importers and distributors (to the retail) in Europe and overseas. This way I had a chance to build up my own private relationship with some substantial US customers what gave me much better jump start (of my own business).

E.: I presume, you are cooperating with many US importers since 30 years. Could you name some of current AGROSİK customers in the USA?

W.: Usually I don't release such information to the public but this time I can make an exception.

All these years we are dealing with POLISH FOLKLORE Import Co., one of the oldest Polish-American businesses in the US. Company was founded and led by Mr. John Mielski from Chicago. He was a pioneer in import of Polish food products and remained one of the most recognized and honored businessmen of Polish descent. Today his successors continue doing same type of business and relationship is widely developed.

E.: Are you focusing only on the ethnic Polish-American market?

W.: Begin was really like that. Thirty years ago so called Polish-American consumers were located mostly in two areas, Chicago and New York. Targeting them was a basic goal those days. Today's reality is quite different. Polish immigrants in the United States are representing now much higher level of income, some of them live in the outskirts of the big cities in expensive, prestigious areas, they much often relocate from the traditional sites to the other states, following better job opportunities etc. We observe two processes running same time: diversification and dispersal. It gives us now a chance of targeting the demanding American customer. This is a major and ambitious challenge for our company. It forced us to establish new sales strategy. We had to find and motivate to deal with us the biggest food distributors and supermarket suppliers in the East and West coast. It was long and difficult work. The main problem was to convince "the elephant" to fruitfully work with "an ant". We succeed! Today we have a business relationship with two partners who belong to the biggest food distributors in the US. It gave us an access to hundreds of supermarkets where sections of ethnic foods include a wide variety of Polish products. This is our biggest and undisputed success.

E.: Is that true that the North American market, especially the US market, is somehow specific? Is it difficult for Polish food manufacturers to get in?

W.: The food business in the USA is much more complicated than in Europe. The

differences are not only in the structure but also in the legal aspect. Food Act is now even more rigorous because of potential threat of bio-terrorism. Everyone who wants to operate on the US food market has to learn, understand and comply with rules of many federal agencies like the FDA, USDA, BATF or US Customs. Any export activity inconsistent with their rules can cause severe financial (and legal) and legal fines, including obligatory food destruction paid by the supplier, product return to the sender or even long-term full closure of the market for the specific exporter.

E.: Is that true that your very good knowledge of the US rules and regulations gives you an advantage to pick up the best food producers in Poland?

W.: It works really like that. Our company provides our Polish suppliers with so called double safety. First, our customers in the US are reliable and financially stable. Second, we assure our Polish partners that products made strictly according to our instructions and export documents issued by us are correct. Of course, this is result of our 30 years of experience in export of food products to the USA. Theoretical knowledge of the rules is not everything. Don't forget that rules related to very similar food products can be different, they can also vary State by State etc. In December 2006 "Rzeczpospolita" (leading professional newspaper in Poland) in its addition called "Law and Economy" published an editorial "Before you will start to deal with America ..."

Together with Mr. Maciej Cybulski I have pleasure to bring closer to the readers rules and secrets of food export to the USA. Full text is available on our Web page "www.agrosik.pl"

E.: Could you, please, in one of our next magazines, explain to our readers, who are interested in export to the US market, how to start doing it?

W.: With pleasure. I don't see any problems. I'm ready to prepare such material. Everyone can also contact us individually!

E.: What are the most interesting issues you observe last years on the food and drink market in the USA?

W.: My answer could be a base for many editorials. I see very interesting the growing problem of obesity and overweight in the US population. It results in serious health complications (heart disease, diabetes) especially among young people. This is a reason of higher interest in, so called, "health and wellness" products. I mean organic food, "better-for-you" products, health drinks, entire fitness segment etc. We see bigger demand on really natural food products. That's why we are one of the first suppliers in the USA bringing there fruit preserves made of 100% fruit with no sugar added. We just introduced 100% fruit juices on a carrot base with addition of another fruits, with no sugar added. Actually we work with some Polish backer's to develop healthy, rich on cellulose, line of baking products.

E.: What (other) comments and observations you would like to share with Polish food manufacturers?

W.: Open North American market gives now Polish food producers more and more opportunities.

Immigration from Poland, especially to the USA, is still growing. Polish ethnic group achieves higher

life standard but is still cultivating tradition. Economic and political ties between Poland and USA are getting tidier. It's expected to ease some travel regulations. Business perspectives are better.

Those are the reasons why we want to invite all food manufacturers potentially interested in starting selling their products to the USA to visit our Web page "www.agrosik.pl". You can also contact us directly under the address below. We are ready to share our experience with you to help you to take optimal business decisions.

E.: Thank you for the conversation.

By Adam Bogacz



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