

## | FROM THE FRUIT TO THE BOTTLE – ONLY THE BEST IS GOOD ENOUGH |

We bring the best of fruit for a healthy and enjoyable life. That is the principle that guides us in everything we do. Thus optimum quality is our top priority, from the careful selection of fruits and raw materials to gentle production processes to the finished product.

Dr. Karl Neuhäuser, Director Quality Assurance, explains what “the best of fruit” means to us and how we achieve the highest possible quality.

Why we don't put just any fruit in the bottle...

*Dr. Neuhäuser, why does Eckes-Granini use only certain fruits for juice production?*

We want to give people who drink our juices and nectars only the best of fruit – and in order to do that, we need certain carefully selected varieties, which we obtain from our suppliers in the form of whole fruits, fruit juice, fruit-juice concentrate or fruit puree. That distinguishes our products from others as well.

*Can you name a few examples?*

When selecting peaches, for example, we look for aromatic varieties with golden yellow pulp. And that is why we use Yellow Cling peaches from Spain and Percocas from Italy for granini. These peaches are available only in limited quantities, and we are the only supplier who uses no other variety for granini peach nectar. For our pineapple juice we use only yellow, especially aromatic varieties like the Smooth Cayenne from Thailand.

*This sounds interesting – do you have any other examples?*

Of course. The pears we use for granini are high-quality Williams Christ from Italy. Pink grapefruits are grown for us by a single producer in South Africa. Since we are his most important customer, he strives to meet our very special requirements.

*How do you buy? What requirements do you set?*

Consistently high quality is very important to us. And that is why we establish strict quality standards for our suppliers every year and buy only fresh fruit harvest during a current season. It is entirely possible that a given supplier may have a surplus – of apples or apple juice for example – which is stored in a warehouse. We do not accept these raw materials.

*So virtually nothing escapes notice when you inspect raw materials...*

That's true. We can exercise a great deal of control on the basis of colour, odour and taste and our own chemical, physical and microbiological testing procedures. Thus we can tell, for example, whether our suppliers have harvested their fruit at peak ripeness or whether too much time has elapsed between harvesting and pressing.

Why we believe that trust is good, but control is better ...

*Dr. Neuhäuser, why does Eckes-Granini start with fruit when it comes to quality assurance?*

We are convinced that healthy, high-quality, good-tasting products can only be produced from the best raw materials. That is why we select our suppliers with great care. We know most of them personally and have worked with them for many years. But we also verify their ability to supply the quality we require through regular, extensive audits conducted by independent testing institutes.

*How about internal control measures?*

We check goods on the basis of samples we receive in advance and then conduct complete inspections when shipments arrive. Goods are not released for processing until we are sure that the results of all quality tests are completely satisfactory. We set demanding requirements for sensory characteristics and apply other strict criteria that go beyond those set forth in statutory regulations – with respect to spoilage indicators, for example, or patulin content in stone and seed fruit. Detected concentrations tell us whether or not the fruit was harvested and processed under appropriate hygienic conditions.

*What do you mean by “careful selection of suppliers”?*

We have been working with most of our suppliers for many years. And we deliberately avoid purchasing our raw materials on spot markets on the basis of price alone. Suppliers to these markets are either unable or unwilling to present certificates of origin, which means that it is impossible to assess the quality of the goods in question. We, on the other hand, always know exactly where the fruit we process comes from.

*You observe the SGF specifications. What does that mean?*

SGF stands for “Sure – Global – Fair” – the name of an association within the fruit juice industry which applies an established system of voluntary self-control based on clearly defined criteria in order to guarantee both the safety and authenticity of raw materials. We require all of our suppliers to accept these additional control measures and to meet the corresponding requirements for processing, hygiene, traceability and documentation. We also impose a contractual obligation to observe a code of conduct containing environmental requirements (emission reduction, waste disposal, water purity, etc.) and social standards (e.g. prohibition of child labour, statutory minimum wage rates, working conditions, etc.).

*Are quality control measures limited to raw materials?*

Of course not. Anyone who has ever visited one of our plants knows that transferring a juice from a tank to a bottle in keeping with precisely defined quality criteria is not a simple matter. And thus we have set up a number of different control points throughout the production process. We perform up to 50 individual checks in some cases.

*What do these quality checks involve, exactly?*

Once raw materials have been released for processing, we perform additional quality tests – immediately before they enter the production line and then at several points during the filling process. Even after production is completed and the product is bottled and stored in the warehouse, it is released for delivery only after passing final tests based on sensory, analytical and microbiological criteria. The entire process is supported by an automated in-process control system. We have also implemented a sophisticated hygiene concept which provides for extensive microbiological testing in our own laboratories. We test the long-term taste quality of our products by having them sampled and assessed in blind tests at regular intervals by experts trained in sensory analysis and by consumers in comparison to products from other suppliers.

**Why our facilities are as clean as an operating room...**

*Dr. Neuhäuser, how would you describe the fruit juice production process?*

Our production system, which is now designed primarily for filling in plastic bottles and cartons, is equipped with state-of-the-art technology. The many processes involved, from production to filling to packaging, have to be precisely coordinated. Thus, for the most part, they are automated and controlled and monitored by our well-trained specialists. Eckes-Granini was a pioneer in the development and marketing of the PET bottle – and not only in Germany.

*Why does this packaging form play such an important role at Eckes-Granini?*

This innovative packaging is in strong demand among consumers throughout Europe because of its obvious advantages – it is very light and doesn't break. We also use a high-quality material composed of special protective layers which protects the vitamins and natural fruit aromas in our products as securely as a safe.

*How does that impact on production?*

Our PET filling lines meet the most recent technical standards as they apply to quality and safety. Our juices, nectars and fruit beverages are filled in specially furnished clean rooms under absolutely sterile conditions. This enables us to dispense entirely without the use of preservatives in all of our products.

*What are the characteristics of these “clean rooms”?*

Constant sterile air filtration and high pressure in these rooms creates a climate in which no particles can be deposited on the products. Bottles and closures are processed under sterile conditions in these absolutely microbe-free areas.

*Can you tell us more about the filling process?*

We use the cold-aseptic filling method. In contrast to standard hot-filling in glass bottles, juice is heated at a lower temperature for a much shorter period of time and immediately cooled to room temperature. In this way, vitamins and flavour components are protected and preserved.

**Why every employee at Eckes-Granini is a quality assurance officer ...**

*Dr. Neuhäuser, why do well-trained, committed employees play such an important role in quality assurance?*

Even the most sophisticated technical measures would be ineffective if our employees did not support our quality philosophy and practise it conscientiously day in and day out. That is why we regard every Eckes-Granini employee as a quality assurance officer who is responsible for quality and performance at his or her workplace.

*What are the basic principles that guide you and your colleagues in your work?*

Our quality management system is based on our guiding principle: “We bring the best of fruit for a healthy and enjoyable life.” And thus we place great emphasis on transparency, networking and continuous improvement. That makes responsibilities, duties and processes visible and comprehensible at all times.