

Organic does not have to be more expensive – Bakery ufaBäckerei – Emelys Garden GmbH, Berlin, Germany

An interview with the factory manager and master baker Mustafa Topal



Please tell us a little about your career and how you ended up being the factory manager of the bakery ufaBäckerei today.

I am a learned master baker and pastry chef, because I love working with my hands. I completed my apprenticeship in a conventional whole sale bakery. Afterwards, I worked in a large organic bakery and completed my master baker and a number of pedagogical and economic further educations along the way. For a time, I also worked in the bakery of a large renowned department store in Berlin, where I eventually became department manager. When I started there, I was surprised how many ready-mixes¹ and additives were used. I was unsatisfied with that and introduced a number of changes. But that did not go far enough for me. I wanted to work much more manually.

Here in the bakery ufaBäckerei, we jointly strive on a daily basis to get back to the roots. I am responsible for the personnel, the purchasing of raw materials, sales as well as the operative and strategic factory management.

What is important to you when purchasing raw materials?

We exclusively work with organic certified raw materials (EU organic label). But whenever it is possible to purchase raw materials with a higher quality grade for a slightly higher price, we buy those. At least half of our raw materials are certified by Bioland or Demeter² although we would not have to use those [for the EU organic label]. We buy those products out of conviction. Additionally, we buy regional products if possible. For example, our oat is

¹ Ready-made mixture of (dry) raw materials

² Bioland and Demeter are two German certification organizations for biodynamic agriculture that are stricter than the EU organic label.

grown in Saxony and is wholly processed in a local mill in the Spreewald region. Our rye stems from an area close to Mellensee here in our region. We produce 100 % organically.

What differences have you determined when processing organic raw materials?

Apart from the kneaders, everything is produced by handwork. Sure, there would be machines for a number of processing steps, but the bakery products should have character. And of course, earning money is also a part of it, but it has to stay human, craftsmanship-like. We do not use additives, baking aids or ready-mixes. We even do not use acerola³. That is vitamin C, why do I need vitamin C in bread. It does not belong in bread.

Of particular importance concerning „organic“ are the extreme quality deviations [of the raw materials]. We need to counter this with a lot of sensory and technical know-how on a daily basis. We rely on the harvest as is. When the grain is inferior due to draughts, the big conventional mills buy their grain from other regions, countries or from the year before and mix the qualities until the grain mixture has adequate baking properties. Of course, we also have to make sure to meet certain standards. What cannot be processed, will be used as feed. And between high quality grain and feed grain is a huge spectrum of qualities. The deviations are highest for grain. But there are also organic dairy products with quality deviations. Especially curd and cream cheese are sometimes more liquid and sometimes firmer. But it is easier to counter because I see the quality right away when I open the bucket and have a look. For grain, it is possible to see slight differences before baking but I do not know for sure before after baking. But that is natural. Thousand years ago, no one analysed the grain for its falling number⁴ or its protein content. Then, the people baked with what they had available.

Do you ever reject a delivery?

Our current suppliers have been active in the organic sector for decades and have a lot of experience. That is why this has never happened. There are quality deviations, but they are within tolerable limits. That is what we also try to communicate to our customers: Organic products do not always look the same and do not always taste the same. This is part of handicraft and organic products. It is natural. Sometimes the bread is two cm higher or lower, sometimes there is a water film visible, and sometimes the bread crumbles slightly when cut. It is still just as digestible and palatable. Some customers mind this, some do not even notice.

Why is „organic“ more expensive?

Organic does not have to be more expensive. Comparing our prices with those of other bakeries, we ascertained that our breads cost about the same. The other day, our pastry “Berliner”⁵ was for once even cheaper than at a discount bakery around the corner. However, our profit does not amount to maybe 70 % but only to around 30 %. This is only profitable for us due to reliable buyers and long-standing partners, but also due to the bulk,

³ Acerola – an extract from the acerola cherry that is rich in vitamin C which improves the properties of the gluten in dough.

⁴ Falling number – amylase activity index that is used to determine the sprout (or pre-harvest germination) damage of grain

⁵ Berliner – a sort of round doughnut, regional German pastry

because we supply all LPG-organic super markets (we are their in-house bakery) as well as a number of other buyers such as resellers, schools and preschools.

The organic raw materials do not cost as much anymore as they did ten to twenty years ago. Today, there is a large supply of organic raw materials and we buy in bulk and have long-term delivery contracts. This way, the farmers can plan ahead differently and stable partnerships with stable prices develop. Of course, the prices are a little higher than in the conventional sector. They are around ten to twenty percent higher.

Do you also get involved with the environment?

We partly use energy, that is directly produced as solar energy on our compound. The remaining energy is from regenerative⁶ sources. We also pay attention to packaging and deliver our bread in reusable baskets. Our paper bags are neither bleached nor chlorinated. Sometimes we use 400

baking sheets a day. Since this costs a lot of resources and produces waste, we reuse the baking sheets as often as possible. Since last year, we also use reusable baking sheets made from a recyclable material. These can be reused up to several hundred times.

What is your greatest professional success?

I am proud that I do not only think from an economic point of view but also from a human point of view. I don't set value on hierarchies and do not act like the boss all the time. I also do not consider myself too good for [manual] work and sometimes like to get my hands dirty.

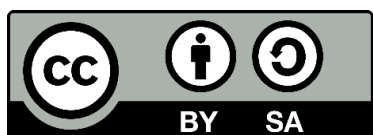


⁶ Regenerative – renewable; relating to something growing or being grown again.

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