

# Hessische Pilztage at Pilzgarten in North Germany

An extremely dynamic grower's association (HPL) is active in Hessen, Germany. This region of Germany not only houses a high concentration of growers of specialty mushrooms, plans for the future are initiated here too. One of their activities is organising the annual Hessische Pilztage.

One of the best HPL traditions is organising the annual 'Hessische Pilztage' in the first week of November, each time hosted by a different company in Germany or one of the neighbouring countries. A company visit in the morning is combined with practically oriented lectures in the afternoon. Unlike the 'Jahrestagung of the BDC' (see article in this edition) the accent is on specialty mushrooms, which gives this event - that has outgrown its status of 'meeting' - a unique position in the West European mushroom world. This year Pilzgarten, a production farm for exotic edibles from North Germany, was willing to host the event.

## Brainstorming session and trade fair

Attendance on 6th November was high, even from non-German speaking countries, not only because Pilzgarten is the German market leader in specialty mushrooms, but also because the announcement of expansion plans stirred the curiosity of the mushroom world. The trade fair, which includes a

half-day commercial exhibition, is an ideal chance to meet and exchange ideas with colleagues and suppliers. The brainstorming session on the evening before the event, after the annual general members meeting, was a resounding success. Expectations were running especially high for the tours and information on the programme's second day. Visitors weren't disappointed, as the Pilzgarten team demonstrated their open company structure with a highly professional approach to business. The reception, tour and trade event were perfectly organised, so no-one was surprised that all processes at Pilzgarten from production to sales are run equally smoothly.

## Pilzgarten

The first years of production and marketing were difficult, as unlike East Asia and the US there was little interest for edible fungi other than white button caps and oyster mushrooms in West Europe at that time. The current Pilzgarten team, who took over the activities of the original Pilzfarm in 1999, deserves praise for introducing many new varieties.



An important and continually increasing turnover has been realised for two lignivorous varieties, *Lentinula edodes* and *Pleurotus eryngii*. Achieved on one hand by perfectly harmonising production to demand, and equally to the impeccably good (organic) quality of the final product. New varieties and strains are continually being tested and launched from the extensive collection of strains provided by the Belgian spawn producer Mycelia. For example *Pholiota nameko* is rapidly gaining in importance, and *Hericium erinaceus*, *Pleurotus cornucopiae* and *Pleurotus salmoneo-*

*stramineus* are being grown in limited quantities for mixed packaging.

## Production methods

Current production methods are based on pasteurising at 98 degrees Celsius, inoculating and incubating individually packed substrates. This works perfectly for most mushroom types, however some spores do survive of certain bacteria, which can cause problems in extremely rare cases.

Jürgen Kynast (R&D) is aware of the exponential increasing risks involved in multiplying production volumes. For the planned expansion project he

made a resolute decision to sterilise individual portions of substrate at 121 degrees Celsius, and to implement far-reaching automation of the entire production process. The major benefits of this system are: minimising the risk of infection, limiting the (crippling) labour costs, eliminating human error and increased standardisation of the end product. Half of the substrate produced will be destined for cultivation of their own mushrooms; the rest will be sold to other European growers. Part of the enormous production capacity will be used to make premium oyster mushroom



Raw materials.



Packing.



Pilzgarten stand in the commercial exhibition.



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Growing rooms.

### Pilzgarten profile:

General manager: Wolfram Rüthe-Müller  
 Number of employees : 72  
 Production capacity: 60 tons of substrate/ week  
 Mushroom production: 350 tons/ year  
 Substrate production area : 4000 m<sup>2</sup>  
 Cultivation area : 3800 m<sup>2</sup>

substrate. This will be a lot more expensive than the pasteurised straw packages currently on offer, but recompenses in other ways: it is a pure axenic product, guaranteed free of foreign micro flora, and it can be heavily enriched to produce a standard, highly productive substrate. Pilzgarten guarantees a yield of 30% absolutely top quality oyster mushrooms in two flushes.

#### Lectures

The first two subjects of the afternoon were, respectively, a presentation of Pilzgarten by

Marianne Rüthe-Müller, and Jürgen Kynast's latest project. These were followed by an overview of specialty mushroom production in North and South America by Torsten Jonas, who is now responsible for mushroom production at Pilzgarten after completing a mushroom project in Guatemala.

The day was closed by two technical presentations about problems with climate control in growing rooms. The first was given by Swiss substrate producer Patrick Romanens, the second by Paul Geraedts from the German company Geraedts in Kleve.



Mycelia stand.

### Experienced Growers

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