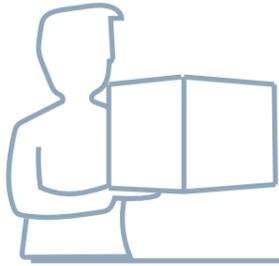




4. CASE STUDIES





Country: Belgium
 Industry: Containers and Packaging
 Website: www.vandveldepackaging.com
 Investment Date: July 2021
 Investment Type: Primary

Van De Velde is a Belgian third-generation family-owned group of packaging companies mainly active in the manufacturing and distribution of ecological cardboard packaging products and machinery for the food, retail and other FMCG industries.

MELANIE VANBELLEGHEM

Marketing and Communications Manager of Van De Velde Packaging

What are your ESG initiatives?

As a packaging producer whose core business consists of the manufacturing of fibre-based / circular packaging, we are quickly seen as a sustainable partner based on the product we offer to our customers. The market today is more than ready to make the transition from plastic to cardboard packaging. We are successful in helping our customers with designing circular fibre-based packaging. This transition has a positive impact on the people and the environment they are living in.

Van De Velde Packaging is able to significantly reduce the plastic share of the packaging of our customers which allows the end consumer to sort and recycle without trouble. In the best case scenario, the customer is able to move forward to a complete plastic free packaging solution.

What is the outcome or impact of these initiatives? Do you have any practical examples?

Zespri is a good example of this. In the past, you would find a corrugated cardboard tray in the fruit aisle of

the supermarkets containing the fruit and with plastic foil around it. The plastic and cardboard can be easily separated from each other, but Zespri still wanted to go that extra mile, and completely ban the plastic. Of course, this needs to be carefully thought through. As a company you want to contribute to a more sustainable world, but unfortunately it remains a business world and we also have to take the economic impact into account. Replacing the plastic film with a cardboard sleeve was therefore an expensive alternative, since the packaging continues to consist of 2 parts, and these are also 2 separate processes in production. Looking for a 1-part cardboard packaging that can be processed in one go on a machine was therefore the ideal alternative for Zespri. And we were able to develop this together with them. This was not an easy task, because 2 pieces of fruit are never identical. So, we had to succeed in designing our machines and packaging in such a way that there was room for variation in the dimensions of the fruits, without the packaging being too tight or too loose.

A similar customer where the transition from plastic

to cardboard was the main goal is Driscoll's. Here too, we thought together with them about what could be the best alternative to plastic berry trays. The difficulty here was the sealability of the cardboard tray. The Driscoll's packaging consists of a cardboard tray, with a plastic foil sealed on it. Sealing plastic directly onto cardboard is a tricky concept. However, after several attempts, we finally succeeded. Driscoll's has chosen to continue to use plastic film, after market research it soon became clear that a full cardboard tray, in which the berries were not completely visible, was not good for customers. Certainly in the field of fruit and vegetables, people still like to see what they are buying, how fresh the products are, whether they are ripe or not yet, ... So the assignment here was to find a solution that makes use of circular fiber based packaging that, on the one hand, protects the product and offers firmness (vulnerable products such as soft fruit), but also does not limit visibility and, on the other hand, also gives the opportunity to communicate clearly on the packaging.

What are the challenges that you are facing & the solutions that you have found?

As Van De Velde packaging, we strive to reduce our ecological footprint as much as possible. We do this partly by using sustainable energy and on the other hand we also contribute to this because our entities are FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certified. In

addition, we also want to make our production process as efficient as possible, because all our companies are BRC¹⁶ certified we have strict rules and regulations regarding food safety. These regulations have allowed us to optimize our production process and guarantee a safe work environment for our employees.

One of our biggest challenges in consolidating these companies is therefore mapping out sustainable entrepreneurship as a group and to continuously drive improvement. Sustainability is a process that never ends. As a group, we can and want to do better. In order to become more sustainable, we need to understand where we are today in order to set goals for the future.

Sustainability has become an integral part of the contemporary business model, not so much because we have to, but mainly because we want to safeguard the well-being of future generations in the longer term. And we realize all too well, that as a new group, we still have important steps to take, which is a critical reality check but also an exciting opportunity! ■

[Watch more on Van de Velde here!](#)



¹⁶ <https://www.brcgs.com/our-standards/packaging-materials/>



Country: United Kingdom
 Industry: Commercial Services & Supplies
 Website: en-gb.thebigword.com
 Investment Date: July 2021
 Investment Type: Primary



Founded in 1980, thebigword provides translation and interpretation services across private and public end markets

INTERVIEW WITH JOSHUA GOULD, CEO OF THEBIGWORD GROUP

ESG isn't something we do for our investors and marketing, it is part of our DNA and business culture. Many businesses see ESG as a set of tick-box exercises, however we believe it's a tool to make the lives of BigWorders more fulfilling, interesting, and meaningful. For us it's a hiring and retention tool, a cause and a reason to choose thebigword over another organization but most of all we do it because we have a genuine interest in our environmental and social impact, and we realize the benefits that strong governance brings to our business.

Before I answer specific questions, I would like to highlight our support for the Ukrainian people. I am sure you have all been watching the unfolding situation in Ukraine with deep concern. thebigword has extensive experience providing Ukrainian interpreters to NATO, the British government and civil service both on-site in Ukraine, in the UK and the US. Over the last week we have been working with charities to deliver free Ukrainian to English interpreting services for refugees. In addition, we have been in constant contact with our Ukrainian linguist base, offering to support where we can with any re-locations. It is times like this where all private citizens and companies must decide whether they want to be part of the solution. thebigword has a clear mission to provide language access to the most vulnerable people in society – this was evident when we recently assisted in the evacuation of over 30,000 people from Afghanistan, with our team only leaving Afghanistan 12 hours before the last US military flight.

What is the approach of thebigword towards ESG policies and best practice?

thebigword operates a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) team and a CSR Policy that oversees the E&S. Our CSR team is made up of people from China, India, Netherlands, USA, the UK, and those individuals come from all levels of our organizational structure. We believe that having such a varied team with people from many different backgrounds ensures that we have a more inclusive and global focus. In addition, we have a board made up of shareholders and non-executives that works with people throughout our organization via our sub committees to meet our corporate governance goals including fair and equal pay, best practice, conflicts of interest and client suitability.



Please can you outline the ESG initiatives put in place by thebigword?

Our ESG initiatives are divided as follows:

- Workplace: aiming to reduce attrition, boost team engagement and support our recruitment best practices, positioning us as a positive place to work.
- Environment: aiming to educate on the environmental impact of some of our current processes/practices and reduce our environmental impact.
- Community: aiming to surpass the money raised for charity and company volunteering days in 2021 and to support charities worldwide chosen by employees
- Marketplace: aiming to support our supply chain and client base through CSR best practice and by partnering with our local, national and international communities.
- Governance: aiming to ensure that the business meets and exceeds the highest levels of fairness, legal and ethical standards.

What was the outcome & impact of these initiatives?

thebigword has been carbon neutral for the last 3 years and I am delighted to share that in 2022 we will have reduced our footprint further to the point that we now offset 105% of our carbon emissions creating a 5% surplus. I think we have to stop being okay with organizations setting long term, made for media offsetting targets, there are plenty of opportunities to support carbon offset programs to ensure that businesses are re-capturing the emissions used.

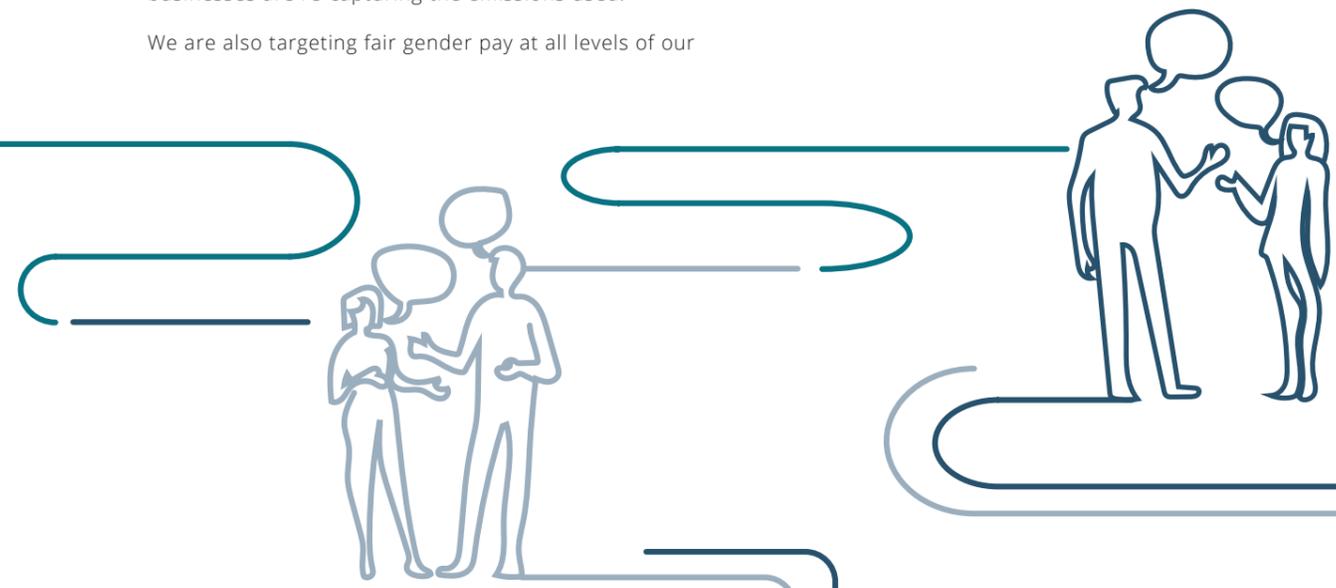
We are also targeting fair gender pay at all levels of our

organization -again we couldn't accept long term targets when short term actions can resolve a key issue and I am happy to report that thebigword has met all its goals for fair gender pay and we publish such information on our website.

New in 2022, thebigword CSR team has also added an education aspect to our work where we will educate our workforce in how we can all play our part to benefit the environment, with hints and tips on our internal social network. We also have an educational program on cultural holidays/events and what they mean to our colleagues globally as well as training on how to virtually fundraise for our selected charities.

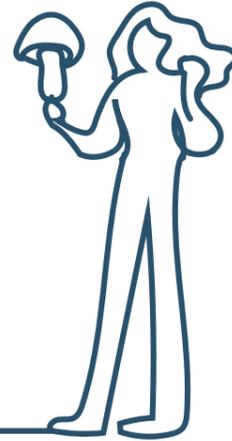
What are the ongoing ESG challenges that the Company faces & what are some solutions you have found to these?

I think the key challenge for ESG is to be able to execute on initiatives within the new virtual working environment. Over 50% of thebigword's workforce is now permanently virtual and we have had to invest in software and train our management in best practices to ensure that we can continue to thrive in a world where there is more flexibility but often more challenges. ■





Country: Poland / The Netherlands
 Industry: Food Products
 Website: www.okechamp.pl
 Investment Date: June 2021
 Investment Type: Primary



Okechamp is one of the largest white mushroom producers in Europe, covering the entire mushroom production value chain.

INTERVIEW WITH AGNIESZKA WOLYNSKA (HEAD OF THE ADAPTATION AND COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT UNIT), VAN DER LINDEN FRANK (CHIEF OPERATIONAL OFFICER), LESZEK EJSMONT (CEO OKECHAMP GROUP) AND MAŁGORZATA KRYSZKOWSKA (QA AND ENVIRONMENT PROTECTON DIRECTOR)

What are your ESG initiatives and what impact have these initiatives had on your business?

Agnieszka Wolynska: We have implemented several ESG policies and procedures across the entire Okechamp Group. These include for instance our code of values, an ethics policy, a procedure for counteracting mobbing & discrimination, a safety policy, an environmental policy, etc. We also have our employee ideas program. This program allows employees of every factory to submit their ideas for how to improve the workplace, safety, and the environment. Managers are responsible for qualifying the most relevant ideas and awarding the best ideas during a ceremony organised by the company. We also have introduced a CSR policy in 2021. Our goal is for this policy to be a practical tool and become a starting point for our activities that focus on areas of social responsibility, as defined by Okechamp. It should be used to initiate a broader discussion regarding Okechamp social responsibility with various stakeholders.

Regarding the “S” of ESG, a very important document for us is the code of values, which we started working on in 2018 and implemented in 2019. It was the idea of employees to have common and understandable values and we invited the employees to join the project. Almost 500 employees complete a survey on values and over 100 participated in code of ethics workshops. So far, we have developed a series of documents and procedures that deal with social responsibility, but we still need to work on the list of KPIs.

Małgorzata Kryszkowska: Regarding the “S” of ESG, we have our environmental policy. In Poland, our environmental policy has been in place since June 2020 and has four main goals:

GOAL 1: To carry out a responsible and well-planned waste management policy

We support recycling campaigns and have signed an agreement with Interseroh one of the leading providers of services for the take-back and recycling of transport packaging in Germany to conduct educational

campaigns, conferences, and webinars on our behalf. Internally, we also conduct cyclical training for our employees on waste segregation, and internal audits which we allow us to measure the success of our various campaigns

GOAL 2: To cut down on the discharges of gases

We improve technological processes and modernise our equipment to reduce its harmful impact on the environment. We also monitor and minimise the emission of gases that deplete the ozone layer.

GOAL 3: To intelligently use raw materials

In the production of compost for mushroom cultivation in our farms, we use biomass (straw) and by-products. We then obtain compost from the cultivated mushrooms, which can be used as organic fertilizer pending the decision of the Minister of Agriculture.

GOAL 4: To minimize the amount of pollution in discharged wastewater

We monitor chemical and microbiological parameters in agricultural wastewater distributed in fields and test wastewater samples every two months in an accredited laboratory. We return a portion of the post-cooling water to the process at the compost plant and monitor the temperature in the post cooling water discharged to the river.

Frank Van Der Linden: In the Netherlands, our environmental strategy is focused around three main projects:

Project Ocean: decreasing the usage of groundwater

We installed more flow meters to be able to have a wider monitoring system in the facility. This

helps to see where we are using the most water.

Project Waste to Taste: reduction of wastewater via upcycling our blanching water to concentrated mushroom juice

Benefits of this project is a reduction of wastewater in combination with an increase of sales of concentrated mushrooms juice. This concentrate is used for the soup and sauce industry with a unique flavor component, umami.

Utility Project: lowering steam pressure

With this project, we are thus saving around 5 to 7% of total gas consumption.

Leszek Ejsmont: Our efforts to become more ecological and not waste any of the by-product of the process has led to two new potential products which has a beneficial impact on the business offering. Firstly the water used to blanch mushrooms and additionally the mushroom stalks hold a lot flavour and we have developed a new method of extracting the flavour for additional new products, therefore minimising product waste.

What challenges are you facing or have you previously faced? How have you managed to resolve them?

Frank Van Der Linden: Over the last seven months our main challenge has been raising awareness amongst personnel responsible for handling technical equipment in comparison with the usage of our utilities, water, gas, and electricity. We have put in place KPIs and our first step will be to collect all relevant figures from our monitoring systems and use the data to express how our ESG policies are helping to reduce waste of water, gas and electricity. We hope this will illustrate the impact successfully and create more awareness among our personnel.

A challenge in the Netherlands is to upscale the production of concentrate in relation to a more sustainable way of producing mushroom concentrate. Currently we are making an inventory to start doing tests with different filter systems in combination with reverse osmoses for a pre-treatment of our concentrate production. The availability of technical equipment and delays in delivery time to do these tests is creating an even more challenging environment. ■

[Watch more on Okechamp here!](#)

