He also paid tribute to his primary contact at GEA, Marcel van den Heuvel who, he said, he’s worked with for 35 years. “We know each other so well, it’s a great collaboration.” Turns out, the relationship between Mora and GEA is so close, there are even Mora products in the GEA employees’ canteen.

Continued innovation
Mora has always been known for innovation. Throughout its history it has come up with new ideas for mouthwatering snacks that led the market and delighted its customers. Just one glance at the company’s website gives a snapshot of the product range, a range that grows continually.

Luc believes that the attraction of air frying will continue to grow. Indeed, Mora has completely changed its production lines to accommodate the trend. But those machines need to be easy to use and have the flexibility built in to accommodate a wide range of products. Product quality will always be paramount and, to achieve that, the ability to control and monitor the condition of the fat in the machine is essential.

Customers continue to demand meat-free products, including vegetarian and vegan, and the growth of cheese within the product mix is an important part of that trend. Luc said that it’s essential to use as much unsaturated fat as possible and keep salt content low. As the trend for air frying continues to be seen as a ‘healthy option’ amongst consumers, so the need for more ‘flash frying’ grows too.

The future together
Mora is part of Van Geloven which itself is part of McCain, a global company. McCain has signaled its intention to grow its share of the snack market and GEA, as a global player itself, is ideally placed to provide that partnership.

Why is Luc so keen to see the co-operation with GEA increase worldwide? He said that so much of what his company produces is currently not sold outside The Netherlands. He wants other people, all over the world, to be able to enjoy the Mora products as well. “It would be good to see, and nice to think that it all comes from a small part of The Netherlands. That would be special.”
Dutch iconic convenience foods cheese soufflés, croquettes and frikandellen, could not have been so successfully brought to market without the pioneering collaboration between GEA’s food processing machine heritage brand Koppens and food producer Mora. Both start-up companies in the early 60s, they worked together to scale up production and delight their customers. Today collaboration still stands strong with continuous food innovation bringing new (plant-based) products to the market, improving technology, optimizing efficiency and enhancing productivity.

Mora started production in 1962 and, according to Luc Hecker, Manager Innovation and new Technology, has used GEA machines right from the start. Some of the equipment still in use dates from the very early days. This includes the Koppens machine from the GEA heritage brand in the pilot plant. After around 40 years it’s still as efficient as ever, but uses a comparatively narrow 200mm-wide belt. By contrast, the newer machines, with their 1000mm-wide belts, take over for full scale production.

There is even a lovely story about how the founder of Mora (a heritage brand of Ad van Geloven, now McCain), Mr. Mourmans, 60 years ago exchanged his car to buy his first GEA machine and, presumably, got his pay-back quite quickly! Today all the production lines use GEA machines exclusively. Luc explained that part of the reason for the exclusivity was that GEA provides a complete concept that starts with raw materials right through to final production. “It’s an ‘all-in-one’ solution that is much smoother and very efficient for setting up new lines.”

But there’s much more to the relationship than just the machines. Technical support is important too and GEA has always focused its after-sales services on ensuring long life and minimum downtime. “It means that if there is a technical problem, we can get help quickly from GEA. It’s important for these lines to keep running. There are ten people on each line. If the line stops, they have no work.”

Changing trends
Luc Hecker has been with the company for 39 years and has overseen the development of new production lines for innovative products throughout that time. He said that the company is currently developing more cheese products. “Cheese is very important because we all eat a little less meat,” he explained. “Cheese is often vegetarian as well. The vegetarian and vegan market is currently developing more cheese products throughout that time. He said that the company is currently developing more cheese products. “Cheese is very important because we all eat a little less meat,” he explained. “Cheese is often vegetarian as well. The vegetarian and vegan market is growing rapidly, cheese is an important part of that.”

Another major development has been the growth in air frying. Air fryers have become very popular in homes so consumers like products that are prepared in that way. This means that Luc has had to pay particular attention to the coatings to create that crisp crust and ensure complete cover of the product. “That’s very important,” he said, “and we get that done with GEA machines.”

Ironically, perhaps, the growth of air frying has seen more fryers added to production lines to accommodate the need for pre-frying. This brief ‘flash frying’ must be short and performed under precisely-controlled conditions. “Our latest GEA fryers allow us to do that.”

Working with GEA
There have been many times when Mora and GEA have worked together to create something magical. Luc recalls, for example, the development of the Chicken Club, a crispy-coated piece of chicken formed around a stick. “We worked with GEA to develop a machine to make it,” he explained. “GEA agreed to keep it exclusive to us and the industry was very jealous that we had thought of it. Even now we still get customers asking for the Chicken Club.” In the same way the two companies often come up with ideas together to improve machines or processes that become standard over time. “The improvements usually give us a year or two’s head start on our competition,” Luc added.

Co-operation leads to expansion
Luc said that his company and GEA had cooperated well over the years with the quality of the relationship being proven by the most recent developments. “Last year we decided to buy a whole new production line from GEA for the Maastricht plant. We believe it to be the most modern production line for cheese products in the world. We have since decided to build a second production line in another factory in the same way. If the machines and the cooperation had not been good, we wouldn’t have done that.”