



# Question & Answer

Jacob Voelkel, CEO  
Voelkel GmbH

**Voelkel is one of the leading German producers of organic juices, with many different products on offer. What products do you manufacture and where are they sold?**

**JV:** We produce more than 200 different types of beverages – including sodas and smoothies, as well as mulled wines and punches for winter – made from fruits, vegetables, plants, spices and vinegar extracts. They're sold via diverse distribution channels: health food stores, conventional grocery stores and bio supermarkets throughout Asia, Europe, Canada and parts of South America and the Middle East. We're currently increasing our use of beverage wholesalers as a sales channel to help meet the growing demand from the food service industry. Authentic organic sodas – soda made by “real” producers with a face, a history and a conscience – are also becoming increasingly popular. Combined with our other segments, such as syrup fruit juices, sodas, vinegars and smoothies, we provide almost every category of nonalcoholic beverage – all of them at organic quality. Voelkel's leading position in our core market, the specialist organic trade, is undoubtedly a result of our manufacturing depth: We process the fruits and vegetables in-house, whenever possible.

**Voelkel is a family-run business with a very clear philosophy. What does it mean to you to be the CEO of a company founded by your great-grandparents?**

**JV:** Our family places great importance on upholding our great-grandparents Margret and Karl Voelkel's core philosophy: “Working together for sustainable agriculture.” This means that Voelkel's products are 100 percent organic and ecologically friendly. The capital the company generates is used to serve company activities and the common good, not the private interests of the Voelkel family. To ensure this, we have transferred the company capital to a company shareholder foundation and a non-profit foundation.

I really enjoy working with my siblings, who are also part of the management team, to continue the legacy of our ancestors. Each of us has a leading role in the company, as does our father, Stefan Voelkel, who is still active as a managing director and combines his experience with our appreciation for innovation. We are also proud of our many dedicated and motivated employees, some of whom have been with us for decades. They help us ensure that all of our products embody the principles of our great-grandparents – it's a real pleasure developing ideas with them.

**In late 2018, you had a new production line installed for fruit and vegetable juices and carbonated beverages. How will this help you improve your production processes and, ultimately, the products themselves?**

**JV:** In order to meet the annual increase in demand for our products, we need high-performance production capacity. The new production line will also help us reduce the resources used per packaging unit. As organic pioneers, we purchase high-quality raw materials and strengthen this focus with our specially initiated cultivation projects. The high quality of our raw materials does however have its price. That's why our production processes have to be especially efficient if we want to remain competitive. After all, we are competing with other manufacturers, some of whom practice anonymous buying with a focus on what is least expensive – without any personal commitment or relationship with the farmer.

**Why did you opt for a turnkey solution for the overall project instead of implementing it with individual partners?**

**JV:** For a project of this size, you need a powerful and conscientious partner who takes every aspect of the overall project into account to achieve a rapid implementation. In terms of resources, we would not have been able to do this with individual partners, as this would have led to a large number of interfaces.

It was therefore very important for us to have a single point of contact who took all of the requirements of the individual components and treated them as an overall project. Having one contact simplifies the communication and implementation channels that are required here. We chose GEA VIPOLL based on the long-standing and close partnership we have with them.

**What consumer trends are you seeing in your industry and which of them have influenced Voelkel's business most in the last two years?**

**JV:** Demand is developing very dynamically; some trends last longer, others change more quickly. Over the last two years, the most significant trends have consisted of an enormous upswing in the smoothie market, especially green smoothies, on the one hand, and functional beverages on the other. Today however, the sales figures for green smoothies are already stagnating. The demand for “less sugar” is a recurring theme. One key observation is that consumers still want more nonalcoholic products with proven health benefits – the trend is shifting from “functional food” to “medicinal food.” In the food service industry, there is a growing demand for ecologically friendly beverages that have a link to authentic people with tangible experiences and stories.





### Best in class

The popular BioZisch beverages are made from 100 percent natural ingredients: organic mineral water from the Voelkel's own state-approved natural spring and enriched with fruit and vegetable juices as well as extracts from bioherbs, spices and teas.



**Many of your products are Demeter certified. That's quite a significant achievement. Does this make it easier or harder for you to find the right partners to help you meet these high standards?**

JV: The organic food industry has demonstrated how to produce healthy food for decades. This movement has now become widely accepted by mainstream society. That's why other distributors – independent retailers and even discount stores – are jumping on the bandwagon. Here at Voelkel, we maintain a pioneer mentality. “Healthy food from healthy structures” is the next logical step; that makes Demeter the perfect choice. Long-term relationships with farmers are necessary for this type of agriculture, and this leads to healthy relationships. If you always buy from the least expensive provider, you'll be left empty handed in the event of shortages. Plus, you'll have set yourself up for all kinds of quality problems. Demeter offers us the chance to be part of the agriculture of the future. A circular economy, active soil conservation, compost management, preferably without using hybrid seed, prioritizing versatility rather than specialization, the use of homeopathic compounds – none of which leads to maximum yields. But it does lead to stability, continuity and nourishing the soil rather than depleting it. This is important in times of increasing weather extremes. Farmers and consumers are increasingly aware of this – and their demands are becoming clearer. Admittedly,

being a pioneer can be a thankless task and often takes you out of your comfort zone. Nevertheless, our work is meaningful, and we take a lot of pleasure in it!

**No industry can afford to ignore Industry 4.0, workplace automation or energy-efficient production. How is Voelkel dealing with this shift as a food producer?**

JV: Industry 4.0 and automation are hot topics for us. Our first step was to achieve ISO 50001 certification for energy management, which involved installing a production data collection and evaluation system. Since then, we have networked nearly all of the components in our plants, allowing us to record not only energy values, but also – at least in part – throughput values, error messages and quality values. Of course, this process can't be completed for the entire company overnight. Our company works with a variety of equipment suppliers, so we are connecting every single process, which is ongoing as we continue to grow and develop. This was another reason we chose to implement an entire project with GEA VIPOLL, which has made the interface as simple as possible and allows us to record and process the values from each machine in the new returnables/non-returnables facility systematically, using the Weihenstephan Standards to ensure quality assurance and internal traceability.

