

BIG PICTURE I Virginie Dufrasne **FOCUS** I The challenges facing the Walloon food sector **INVEST** I Safran Blades boosts production in Wallonia

editorial

SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATION: DRIVERS OF INTERNATIONALISATION?



A sustainable company that exports its products. Is this a contradiction, or plain common sense? François Gemenne, renowned expert on climate and environmental geopolitics and keynote speaker at Food Connections 2025, an event co-organised by Fevia and Wagralim, maintains that one does not exclude the other; on the contrary, they reinforce one another. His main points: combining sustainability with a pioneering spirit, and fostering a quality-driven approach that will appeal to other countries. The goal is to help companies identify their export markets by finding niche areas that demand the quality they deliver, in the name of health and well-being. It is essential to stay one step ahead.

The key words are sustainability and innovation. And not just in the agri-food sector. The construction company Lixon, for example, champions the renewed expertise of a third generation. Safran, a flagship of the aeronautics industry, is investing in a sustainable, digital factory. Sortlist is creating a technological platform that brings together partners and suppliers based on their resilience. Finally, Mellow is adding the concept of governance, enabling committed participation from its teams. The companies you will discover here, whether they operate in the sectors of design, fashion, flowers or chocolate, are contributing to a Wallonia made from excellence and talent, whose products serve as a marker of quality around the world.

What do you think?

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WAB contact www.wallonia.be

BELGIUM WINS BRONZE MEDAL AT EXPO 2025 IN OSAKA

Belgium was in the top 3 out of 160 countries for its interpretation of the theme "Designing Future Society for Our Lives". Led by Louvier-based architect Cyril Rousseaux and his firm Carré 7, the Belgian pavilion showcased Walloon excellence in healthcare.







LIEGE JOINS THE UNESCO CREATIVE CITIES NETWORK

In November 2025, UNESCO recognised the city of Liege as a 'Creative City of Music', a first for Wallonia. With its wealth of iconic venues and major festivals, Liege is now part of a selective international network. This designation is a major boost for this dynamic city, paving the way for new cultural collaborations.





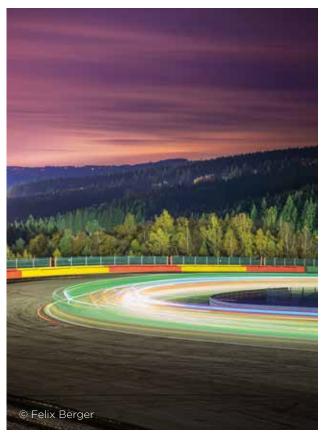
BELGIUM WILL BE THE SITE FOR A EUROPEAN AI FACTORY ANTENNA

The EuroHPC Joint Undertaking consortium has asked Belgium to host an AI Factory Antenna, offering Walloon stakeholders direct access to LUMI and JUPITER, the European supercomputers. This structure is set to strengthen regional innovation in AI. It will also enable training and support the integration of the Walloon ecosystem into the Europe's "AI-First" strategy.

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS SETS HYDROGEN IN MOTION

A TWEED Cluster event, held in October 2025 at the famous racing circuit, served as a European showcase for hydrogen-powered heavy-duty mobility. Between the demonstrations of zero-emission trucks and the discussions between manufacturers, researchers and public authorities, Wallonia's strategic role in the development of a hydrogen valley on a European scale was confirmed.







UMONS'S BREAKTHROUGH IS PUBLISHED IN "SCIENCE ADVANCES"

The work of Professor Sylvain Gabriele and Dr Marine Luciano, from the University of Mons, highlights Mons's excellence in mechanobiology. Their research reveals how mechanical forces influence cells, paving the way for innovative "mechanomedicine" and positioning Wallonia as a key player in the healthcare of tomorrow.

Virginie Dufrasne

130 YEARS OF EXPERTISE FOR THE FUTURE OF CONSTRUCTION



After graduating in management studies from UCLouvain, she began her career at McKinsey. But fate called her back to Lixon, first as a Corporate Secretary overseeing an audit, and a year later, to take on the role of CEO. At the age of just 25! "I had not been prepared to take over the family business, and it really felt like I was walking through a tunnel with no light at the end." Being determined and resilient, she trained herself, surrounded herself with the right people, and listened. "I put in double the work, because I wanted to get up to speed and master the subject." Bit by bit, this third-generation representative of the family made her mark.

With her at the helm, Lixon continued its growth. Historically focused on new construction and building renovations, the company experienced further growth in the areas of property development and rental property investment. This strategic shift was designed to stabilise business in the face of the moribund market for new residential developments, as well as the risk of lower public investments. Investment in rental property is also "an opportunity to offer high-quality rental properties, which is also a way to create sustainable value."

As sustainability must also be practised internally, "This is why we must invest! In technology, in ecological transition, and in staff well-being."

Virginie Dufrasne and Lixon have always championed a 100% Walloon ethos. "Our intention is to promote Wallonia, so we support local partners. We are able to make decisions rapidly thanks to our Walloon family shareholders, and we can also rely on our strong teams! Some families have spent their entire careers with our company", which is synonymous with the transfer of Lixon's know-how and values.

A mother of four, Dufrasne combines thoroughness and humility with a desire to learn. "It is important to listen, to question oneself, and to engage in continuous learning." Although she admits suffering from imposter syndrome during her early years, today she feels a sense of fulfilment and thrives on the reputation that she has earned over time. "The company has become my family."

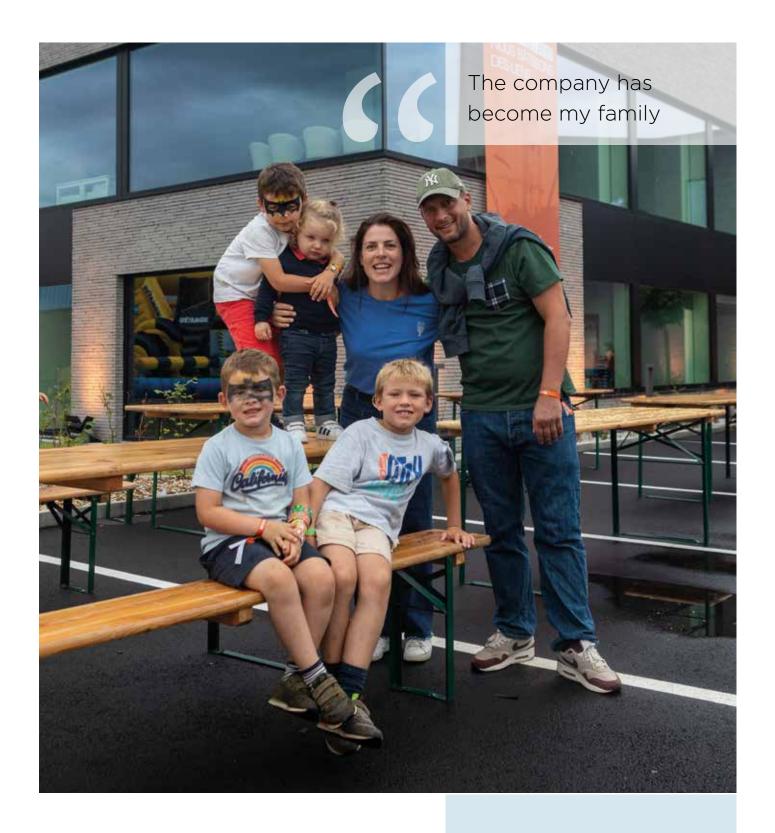




VIRGINIE'S TIP

Never give up! Work hard, because hard work always pays off.





This year, Lixon is turning 130. This exceptional milestone is being commemorated with a Family Day celebration and an official event. And the company's birthday present? A record year with a turnover of €105 million and 45 sites underway simultaneously.

Building and running

"I go running several times a week. I always carry sportswear in my car. I ran my first Brussels 20 km race this year. Running has become essential to my physical and mental well-being."

Nexova

WALLONIA SET TO BECOME A CORNERSTONE OF EUROPE'S CYBER SOVEREIGNTY



In Transinne, at the heart of the Galaxia business park, Nexova recently opened their new cybersecurity centre, the only one of its kind in Europe. The result of a 100% Belgian investment of €20 million, and covering an area of 3,330m², the centre will focus on protecting critical infrastructure and providing customized services. For Gaëtan Desclée, CEO of Starion and Nexova, the building represents a step towards much-needed European cyber sovereignty.

Pictures © Nexova Cyber



Nexova is already protecting major institutions in Europe in the energy, transport, telecoms and space sectors. Its mission is to provide cybersecurity without using technologies from outside Europe. "This centre was developed to anticipate the most substantial risks. Our clients are looking for local, sovereign solutions so they can avoid relying on Chinese or American technologies."

According to Gaëtan Desclée, "physical violence has increasingly transformed into digital threats. Cybercrime could be considered the world's third greatest power, after China and the United States!" It is therefore critical to stay safe, "and to educate yourself as well! Because once an attack takes place, it is often too late."

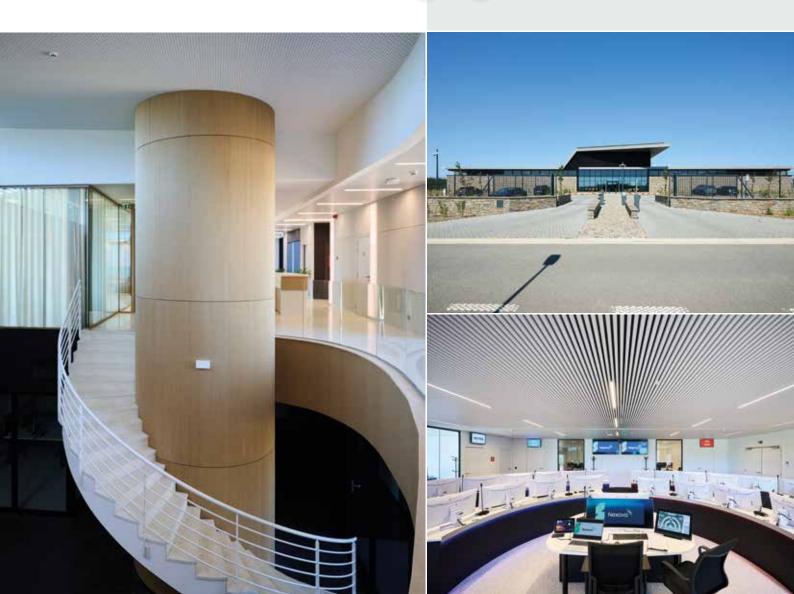
Transinne was chosen as part of the larger strategy to build a European "cyber valley" in Wallonia. The Galaxia business park is already home to the ESA, several space organisations and a blossoming technological ecosystem. Nexova is planning to recruit 100 experts for the centre by 2026. "Wallonia has an impressive talent pool, and its assets — its appeal, quality of life, and proximity to European hubs — enable it to draw in highly specialised candidates."

Recently nominated in the Belgian province of Luxembourg for the 2025 Godefroid award for innovation, the group, which employs 700 engineers in 9 countries, aims to double in size in three years, while strengthening its role as a European industry leader.

This high-tech building was designed by ASSAR, the architects who designed both the NATO headquarters and the headquarters of the Belgian Armed Forces. It includes state-of-the-art technologies:

- A cyber-range for simulating complex attacks, testing, and training teams using real conditions
- Digital twins of critical infrastructure that can be used to simulate a power station, a ministry or a transport network in order to test their resilience
- A techno-lab for researching secure connectivity solutions
- Isolated data centres and restricted zones, up to and including top secret level (secret défense)

We protect what keeps countries running.

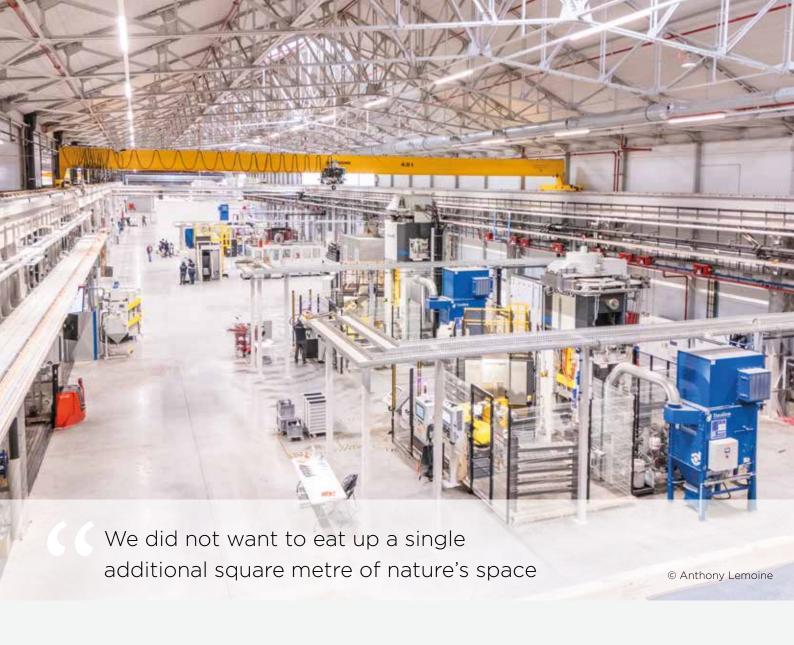


Safran Blades

WALLONIA WELCOMES A
NEW HIGH-TECH PLANT FOR
MANUFACTURING COMPRESSOR
BLADES

Safran Aero Boosters, the aerospace company specialising in aircraft engines, established a production plant for jet engine compressor blades at Marchin, in Liege Province, in June 2025. This is a major investment of over €100 million, funded by both the regional and federal governments.





"Our intention was to consolidate the supply of blades, which are a key component", said François Lepot, CEO of Safran Aero Boosters. The challenge is clear: "We need to take the lead in terms of technology, production and sustainability. And more importantly, given the urgent issue of deteriorating geopolitical stability, we must be able to control our value chains and resume local production.

Constructed on a former steel industry wasteland which was thoroughly cleaned and restored, the plant sends a strong message. "We did not want to eat up a single additional square metre of nature's space. Everything had to be reinvested, decontaminated and rehabilitated." Sustainability was incorporated right from the beginning.

Wallonia was not a random choice. The proximity of engineering teams, Wallonia's historical industry-heavy heritage, "and partners who honour their commitments!" were all decisive factors. Wallonia welcomed the project with open arms, enabling rapid completion. The company was founded in partnership with public authorities in Wallonia and the Belgian Federation, through Wallonie Entreprendre (28%), and the Belgian Federal Holding and Investment Company

(SFPIM) (16%), both shareholders alongside Safran Aero Boosters (56%). The plant is a fully digitised, automated, local and global centre of excellence. "We called upon our local partners, involving many Walloon SMEs, which are now flourishing thanks to this project."

The regional impact has been seismic, with the creation of 150 highly skilled jobs, the establishment of a whole new ecosystem of tech SMEs that are now growing through their collaboration with Safran, and an international showcase for Wallonia. "This project is now attracting and inspiring other industries, making them want to establish themselves here."

Safran Blades has thus made one of the most transformative investments of the decade in Wallonia, and aims to produce 700,000 compressor blades a year by 2026.



Sortlist:

REINVENTING B2B FOR THE ULTRA DIGITAL AGE

In 2015, Nicolas Finet, Thibaut Vanderhofstadt, Michael Valette and Charles De Groote had just finished their studies and believed the digital age was about to change the world. That belief led them to found Sortlist.

"You have to dream big and invest despite the uncertainty. Those who dare win!" "The digital revolution had completely changed the game. Competition had become global," said CEO Nicolas Finet. "Several businesses were going to win big, others would be crushed. We wanted to help the winners meet the right people." Sortlist was launched as platform for connecting businesses and service providers.

Innovation began at the conceptual level. "At the beginning, we did everything manually, over the phone." Then, the online platform was developed. "We naturally translated into the three languages of Belgium. That's why we were able to internationalise straight away!" It was followed by full digitalisation, data management, and Al, which enables smart briefing features, automated budgets, instant recommendations and predictive tools for service providers. "People no longer search like they did 10 years ago. With Al we can build intelligent and predictive tools to help businesses make quicker decisions."

Innovation was not just technical or technological — it was also entrepreneurial. "After the Covid-19 crisis, we had to reinvent ourselves to stay afloat. We revised our model, we closed many of our offices, located in nearly every European capital, in order to recentralise here in Wavre and return to profitable growth."

Today, the scaleup covers 3,000 services, connects 100,000 providers, operates in 140 countries and employs more than 100 people. And what does the future hold? "Tools that are even simpler, smarter and faster."







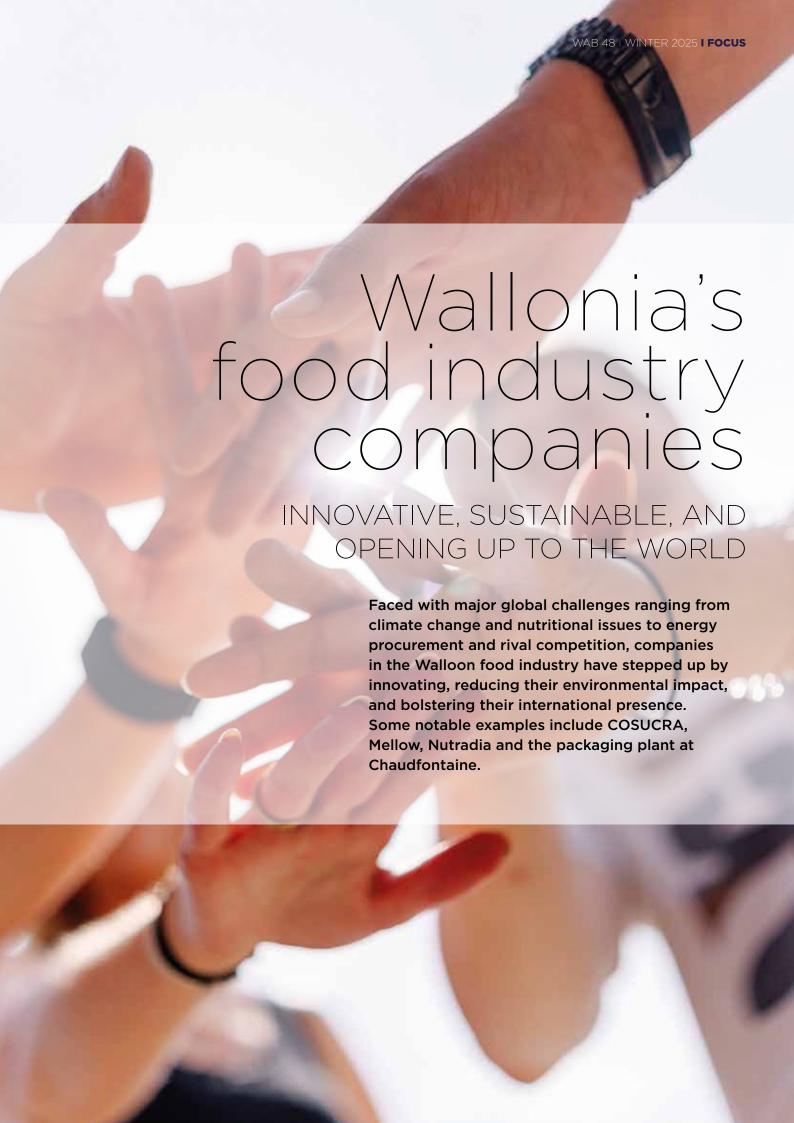


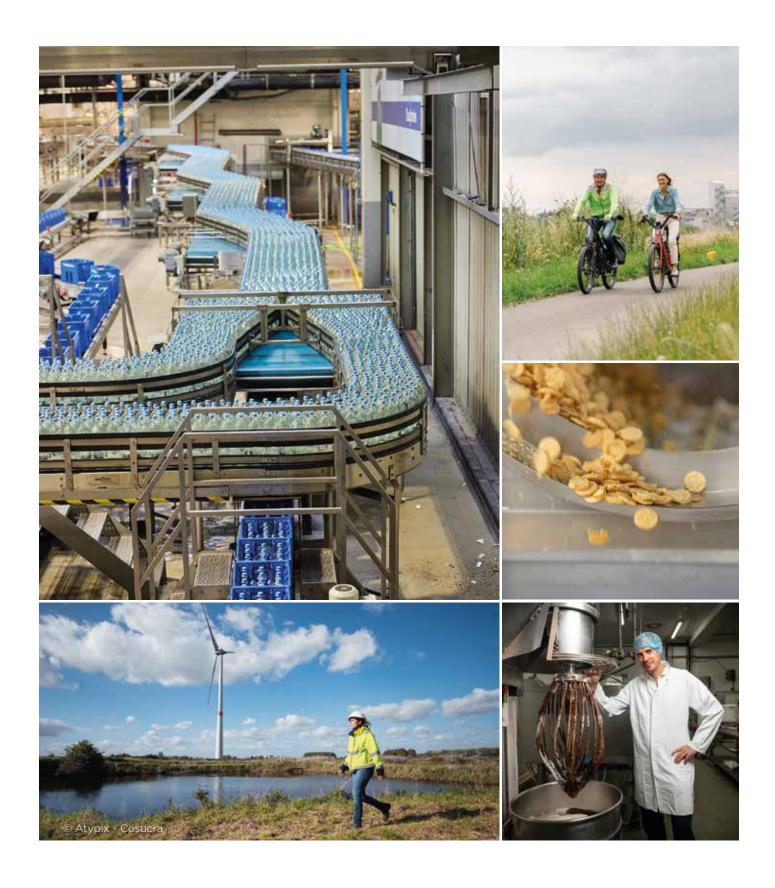












All these companies are supported and encouraged by the Fédération de l'industrie alimentaire (Food Industry Federation, or Fevia) and the Wagralim Agri-Food Cluster. According to Anne Reul, General Director of Fevia Wallonia, "the sector's robustness will depend on our collective capacity to invest in innovation and in more sustainable practices, while maintaining our hallmark quality." Emmanuel Vanzeveren, General Director of Wagralim, highlights new dynamics: "We must reinvent agronomy and processing, as well as adopt different production methods, increasingly boosted by science, technology and

cooperation, while cultivating a sustainable, grounded and respectful vision."

This ecosystem is bringing together several players to create a fertile ground for initiatives to develop rapidly, and for local and regional innovations to expand internationally.

RETHINKING PRODUCTION METHODS

sustainability as the driving force of industry

WALLOON
COMPANIES ARE
SHOWING THAT
SUSTAINABILITY
HAS BECOME
A MAJOR
INDUSTRIAL
DRIVER, AS
EVIDENCED BY
THE SITES AT
CHAUDFONTAINE
AND MELLOW.

Chaudfontaine-based Coca-Cola Europacific Partners have transformed a century-old site into a role model of environmental transition. Boasting an investment of over €100 million, the site is carbon-neutral certified and was labelled as a Factory of the Future in 2025. "Our water undergoes a 60-year journey before arriving here, and it is our responsibility to protect this resource," states Arnaud Wislez, Senior Quality, Environment, Safety & Health Manager. Every feature of the site was integrated with the intention of reducing the carbon footprint and improving efficiency. This includes a water turbine, the natural heat emitted by the mineral water spring harnessed for heating the building, river Vesdre used for cooling, and securing





the local inhabitants' fuel tanks to protect the aquifer. The site has become a benchmark for other companies.

Mellow, a premium dessert specialist that was formed from a merger between Dessert Factory and Verbau, has taken a similar approach. Their aim is to make corporate governance and corporate social responsibility a key performance driver. In 2024, the company created the role of Director of Corporate Social Responsibility, to which David Heredia was appointed. He says: "Companies have a pivotal role to play in making the world a better place. It is important to create a virtuous circle." For their 2025-2030 roadmap, Mellow aims to expand their concrete actions, focusing on carbon footprint, an energy audit, sustainable purchasing and certified cocoa. "We must empower our teams to take responsibility, allow everyone to find their place and be heard, and provide tools to create collective intelligence through participatory governance, coaching, and continuous training."

RETHINKING INNOVATION

generation of opportunities through science

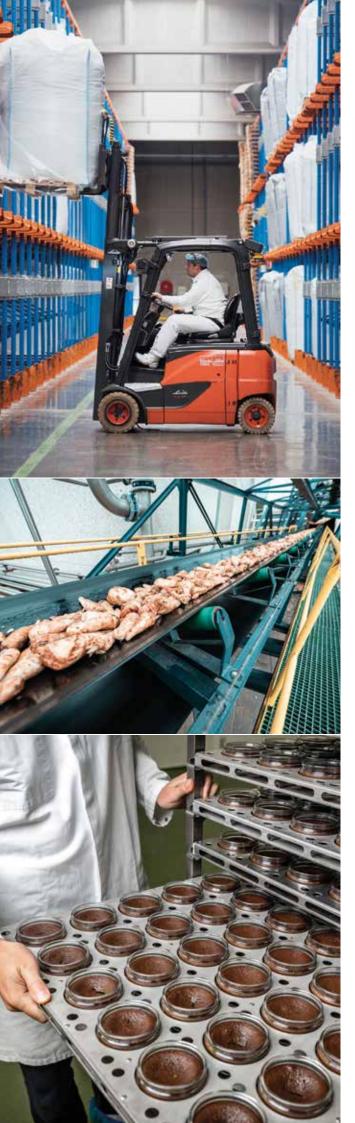
THROUGH THEIR
INNOVATIONS, NUTRADIA
AND COSUCRA
DEMONSTRATE HOW
TO BOOST THE MARKET
AND STAND OUT THANKS
TO HIGH ADDED VALUE.





Based in Andenne, Nutradia is a major producer of popped chips, which are airbaked chips that do not require frying. Having doubled their capacity in 2023, the company now has a presence on four continents. "Our innovation comes as much from the laboratory as from our customers. We are experiencing a constant demand for more practical, more protein-rich and healthier recipes. Naturally, we must always stay one step ahead," explains Jérôme van Kempen, Head of Sales. Nutradia's high-protein, gluten-free and fibre-enriched products showcase how the company combines scientific expertise with a meticulous understanding of global expectations. "Expectations are high, and high demand is opening up new opportunities."

COSUCRA, meanwhile, is pursuing a different route. They focus on natural, "plant-based" ingredients used in plant nutrition, hybrid approaches combining animal and plant ingredients, and targeted nutrition. The PISANE™ pea protein and FIBRULINE® chicory root fibre have turned the company into a worldwide supplier. "Our aim is to offer clean label solutions and to assist manufacturers in restructuring by limiting additives and sugars," says Eric Bosly, CEO. This aim is further solidified through the V-Corp certification and investments made to increase production capacity, as well as in R&D. Global demand for plant-based protein further strengthens its strategic role: producing in Wallonia to promote global food transition.





IN THE PURSUIT OF INTERNATIONAL GROWTH

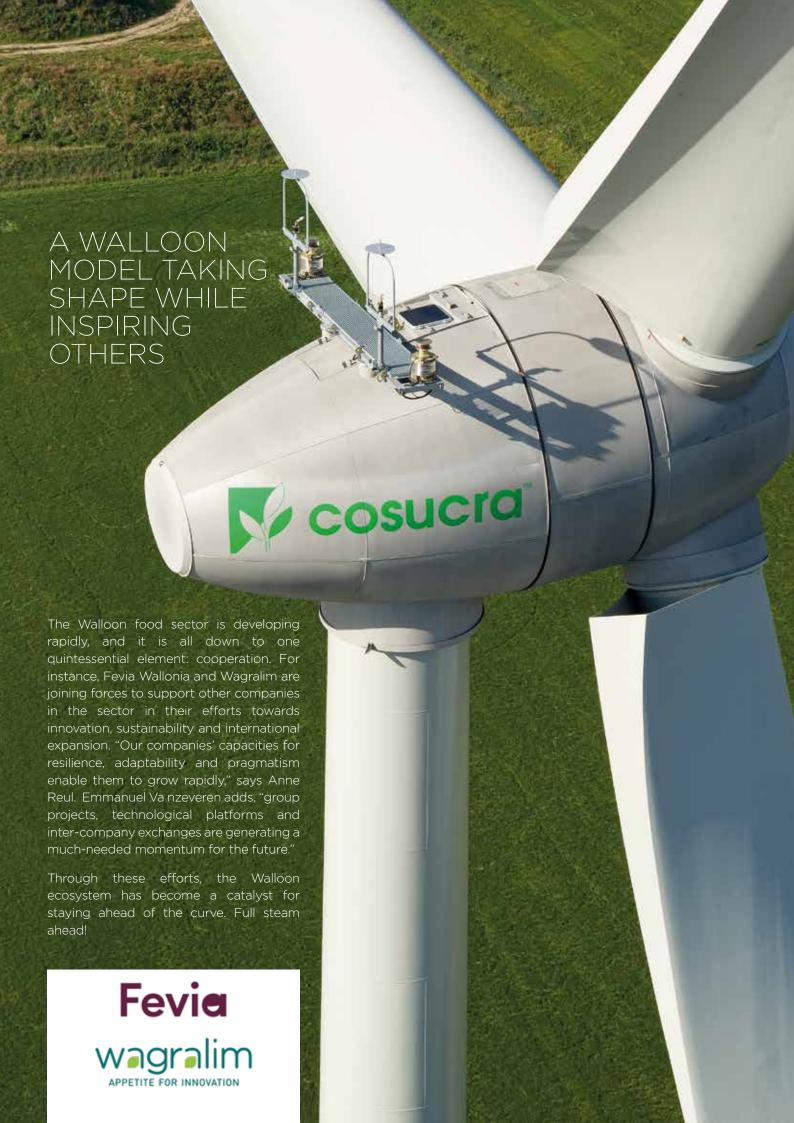
Walloon companies understand one thing very well: expanding internationally translates into consolidating their model, propagating their innovations, and amplifying their impact. So much so that exports make up nearly half of the turnover in the Walloon food industry.

For COSUCRA, the takeaway is clear: "Our sales in Belgium amount to just 7%. In order to be sustainable, you need to scale up to the European level at least," says Éric Bosly. The company promotes tailor-made products and adapts its recipes to local food cultures, such as textures for American markets, aromatic profiles for Asia, and specific applications for the Middle East.

For Nutradia, innovation is the key to global growth. "Exporting successfully requires innovation, quality and good-tasting products: only if these three elements come together do the doors open", says Jérôme van Kempen. The perceived quality of the "Made in Belgium" brand and Wallonia's logistically strategic central location further strengthen this dynamic.

Mellow exports 95% of its production to 41 markets. "The more we sell, the further we can afford to go in our commitments," says David Heredia. "Sustainability is becoming an expectation among our international customers."

Finally, Chaudfontaine is also going global, but in a different way: through the sharing of knowledge. The site, which distributes 150 million litres of products every year within a 250 km radius, plays a key role. "We test, we prove, then we share our methods with the group's other sites across the world," says Arnaud Wislez.



Garden of Lights The Smurfs at Rixensart



The 2025 Garden of Lights is being held this year at Rixensart Castle. After Dinant in 2024, the Smurfs are taking over the historic castle from 14 November to 15 February. This is an opportunity to celebrate the end of the year with colourful and fascinating illuminations and amazing fairy-tale walks inspired by the world of Peyo.

"It's more than just a light show, it's a unique experience where fairy tales, technology and creativity come

together. It's magical," explain the organisers. "It is set to feature a 1.5 km trail through the gardens and paths of the castle, lit by thousands of LEDs, projections and sound effects that really bring Peyo's heroes to life." All the ingredients needed to capture the imagination!

The world of the Smurfs brought to life: lots of fun for young and old alike.

https://gardenoflights.com/en/rixensart



Garden, lights

Schikourfs



14 NOVEMBRE - 15 FÉVRIER
La première féerie lumineuse
au Château de Rixensart

www.gardenoflights.be

Pour d'autres idées de séjours et activités en hiver

www.VISITWallonia.be/Winter



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsNI7EIIT7M

SAVOURING BELGIAN CRAFTSMANSHIP

Winners of the Gault&Millau Discovery Award 2026, Jérôme Deborne and Raphaël Vanda are bringing attention to Wallonia from their *chocolaterie* at the Château de Leignon. For them, chocolate is, most importantly, a way to reconnect: a Belgian twist on Proust's madeleine. But it is also about the future: an invitation to explore new horizons through their enticing creations that delight the palate.

They are committed to working with fair trade, highquality cocoa and other products, choosing each ingredient for its quality and values. Looking forward, their main ambition is to forge closer links with local producers who are practically neighbours.

You won't find mass-produced chocolate here, as Raphaël and Jérôme tell us: "Each little treasure tells the story of a Wallonia that is alive and proud of its craftsmanship, where you can taste the passion and high standards in every mouthful."





"Culture may not generate profit, but it does create human, economic and social wealth."

Director of the non-profit MNEMA since May 2025, Axelle van Harten personifies a new generation of cultural leaders: committed, curious and resolutely people-centred. La Cité Miroir is a former thermal complex in Liege that has become a major centre for memory, culture and citizenship, and at its helm, Axelle van Harten is striving to strike a balance "between past, present and future, through a range of events and exhibitions."

She used to come to this place in her youth. Today, she considers it an ideal forum for expression, where values and transmission intersect. "What has struck me is the energy and passion I see in the teams working

here. Every project, every exhibition carries a sense of collective commitment."

With nearly 70,000 visitors a year, La Cité Miroir's influence extends far beyond Liege. By opening up more to international and intercultural dialogue, Axelle van Harten wants to emphasise that Wallonia is a place of living culture, a culture that questions, connects and transforms.

La Cité Miroir is also home to a former air-raid shelter, a listed Walloon heritage site. It is currently being renovated and is set to offer a new immersive experience and a new aspect to discover. <u>Check out the video</u>.

FAÇON JACMIN

MAKES ITS DEBUT APPEARANCE AT PARIS FASHION WEEK

Very recently, and for the first time, the Belgian brand FAÇON JACMIN, founded in 2016 by sisters Alexandra and Ségolène Jacmin, was included in the official calendar of Paris Fashion Week. This is an important step in the international journey of the eco-conscious brand, which benefits from the support of Wallonia-Brussels Design Mode (WBDM) as part of their Fashion Programme.

The brand presented its Spring/Summer 2026 collection at the Paris headquarters of the Wallonia-Brussels General Delegation, continuing to champion its commitment to upcycling and the circular economy. "Being part of Fashion Week is a huge recognition of our work and our commitment," says Alexandra. The designs, created exclusively in collaboration with European workshops, are inspired by androgyny and streetwear, embellished with repurposed or minimalist details. Combining sophistication and a commitment to sustainability, FAÇON JACMIN offers unique looks that inspire self-confidence. Chic Belgian fashion with personality has arrived in Paris – hats off to them!

© Camille Mompach







Chantal Post, the poetry of flowers

"A BEAUTIFUL ARRANGEMENT IS A POEM YOU CAN SEE WITH YOUR EYES."

Based in Vielsalm, Chantal Post has been working with flowers and plants for over 30 years. A florist, an artist and the 2024 Belgian floral art champion, she is the first Walloon finalist in the World Cup Floral Art 2025, held in The Hague.

She trained in the Netherlands, and her approach combines creativity, rigour and feeling. She finds inspiration "from everything around me." As president of BE-Florist, she highlights the importance of passing on knowledge: "Training, learning to be patient and striving for excellence are the things that protect our profession. You become an artist over time." Her next goal is - why not! - to take part in the next world championship.





© Aurélien Lacroix









Cornella

ICE CREAM CONES THAT EVERYONE CAN ENJOY

Four students from the Agronomy Department at the École Charlemagne in Huy have created Cornella, an ice cream cone made from brewer's spent grain and enriched with lactase, an enzyme that helps digest lactose. "The idea came from a real need, as Amory was lactose intolerant and we wanted to innovate in a sustainable way." This project, which combines science, health, great taste and sustainability, has earned them first prize in the Ecotrophelia Europe competition. Future commercial opportunities are possible, with "the development of gluten-free products, for example."



Wallonia, your gateway to Europe



GG

You have to dream big and invest despite the uncertainty.
Those who dare win!

Nicolas Finet, CEO of Sortlist



