



INVESTING MEANS SAFETY, FOR OUR CUSTOMERS TOO

Everyone talking about agriculture in Wallonia can't miss out the Joskin Group. The family business, whose registered office is located in Soumagne, is indeed well-known for its spreading systems and its agricultural trailers. The dynamic founder and business manager, Victor Joskin, received us. – *Anne Vandenbosch*

The Joskin Group has been existing for 46 years. It has also been manufacturing machines under the brand name Joskin for already 30 years.

Furthermore, it started importing agricultural machinery forty years ago. Two years ago, this activity became a company in its own right: DistriTECH. Meanwhile,

new large buildings were erected, both on the sites of Soumagne and Poland. 2014 is thus again a step in the history of this Walloon company.

In the limelight

It is not easy to get an interview with Mr. Joskin. This business manager is very

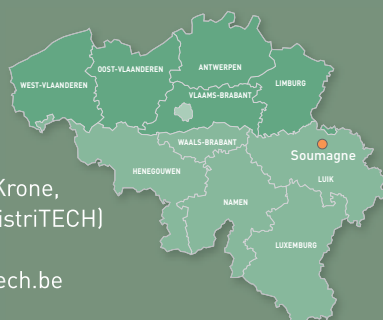
busy. He is shuttling back and forth between the parent in Soumagne and the factories of Poland and France. In recent years, his enthusiasm and the family business growth were often put in the limelight, both in the country as abroad. A few examples: in 2007, this company was, among others, finalist of the well-known contest "Company of the Year". Last year, the Joskin Group was awarded the "Marianne de Cristal" and the "Prize of the Best Belgian Investor in France" by our southern neighbours. Moreover, Victor Joskin was nominated for the title of "Manager of the Year". "These distinctions are a good reference for our company and staff", said Mr. Joskin. "They also give us a recognition outside the agricultural industry. I think it is important to be well portrayed in the media. We notice, especially here in Wallonia, that it is not easy to show the agricultural sector in a positive light."

JOSKIN GROUP

Commune: Soumagne

Specialization: manufacturing slurry tankers and agricultural trailers (Joskin), importing Hardi, Quicke, Evrard, Rauch, Krone, Strautmann, Monosem, Sulky (JOSKIN DistriTECH)
Staff: 823

Website: www.joskin.com en www.distritech.be



Listen to practice

For the last 46 years, the Joskin company has constantly kept growing. Victor Joskin started in 1968 as a contractor (to stop this activity in 1977), then was a dealer and an importer of agricultural machines and finally launched the production of his own slurry tankers in 1984. Soumagne was and remains the company headquarters. However, in 1999, an extra production unit was built in Trzcianka (Poland) and another one in Bourges (France) in 2002. In our country, a new unit was also opened in 2007 in Andrimont. This year, the sites of Soumagne and Trzcianka are once again expanding. It is therefore not surprising that the staff file is also evolving in this period of time. The Joskin Group had about 10 years ago 362 employees. Today, they are 823, with 380 of them in Belgium. The company is however planning to hire some more people in a near future. The Joskin Group's consolidated turnover has increased from 30 million in 2000 to almost 99 million Euros last year. In 15 years time, the Group's turnover has thus increased threefold.

"When I was 20, I never thought that I would go that far", admits Mr. Joskin. "In order to evolve, a proper view of the future is constantly needed. Today, it is ever more the case than before. Competition in the agricultural sector is indeed very intense. We have to look for the technique that we better manage than the colleagues. We therefore have to closely follow developments. Progress also means satisfying customers' wishes, even if contractors, for instance, are ever more demanding. They have to make the most from their work because it is their final profit. It also means that as a manufacturer, we have to evolve ever more rapidly."

Victor Joskin could launch his production of slurry tankers because he could listen carefully. "Thanks to my work as a contractor at the beginning of my career, I could know, thanks to practice, which were the crucial demands. Since the existing manufacturers could not meet it, I launched my own production of slurry tankers. To that end, I made sure the product remained affordable and I limited myself to the internal market." Even if in the meantime, the 3 children of Victor and his wife Marie-JosÉ took key positions in the company (Vinciane handles the administration and financial management, Didier the production and IT management and Murielle the human resources and the marketing), the business manager is still handling customers' specific de-

mands. At that level, he is a sort of filter to (new) ideas.

"I am a "generalist" for the company. I must be able to analyze if a novelty or an idea is feasible. I also think that having

raise the company's visibility. It is here that the production management and the development of the whole Joskin Group happen, just like the IT department and the automation. On each site, there are



Victor Joskin is a dynamic business manager who has clear view: "Last year, we made important investments but we trust the market. There certainly is potential for our material."

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grown up in the agricultural sector is a precious advantage. Moreover, I am surrounded by excellent employees. Today, new developments are especially made at the automation level. That is the reason why our workshop for the repair and maintenance of tractors is very important in order to be able to closely follow these improvements. These employees' knowledge combined to that of the engineers of our own design office lead to new developments. The hitching between the tractor and the tool is extremely important. Both machines need each other and should therefore evolve together. That is why it is important to keep good contacts with tractor manufacturers."

Registered office in Soumagne

The registered office is located in Soumagne, along the E40. The new buildings

also accounting and sales departments. "95% of the steel comes to Soumagne. We indeed have very sophisticated laser cutting robots. Almost all European steel is produced within a radius of 200km of the company. It is a real advantage since transporting steel is expensive. Thanks to the important competition, we get the best purchase prices and we can better sell back the waste. We only transport cut to measure material to Poland. In this way, the load can be maximized. All steel sections and precision parts are also made in Soumagne. A part of the Joskin slurry tankers is manufactured in the special unit of Spaw Tech in Andrimont (spaw means welding in Polish). The smallest models are produced in Poland. A sort of muck spreaders is manufactured in Soumagne, another in Bourges and the two last ones in Trzcianka. Novelties, like the recent Drakkar, are developed and (temporarily) manufactured at the company headquarters. We significantly invest in welding robots. They continuously provide an excellent quality. For instance, we have a very big robot which welds tipping trailers. In total, there are here 8 welding robots and 5 of them in Poland. For the rest, Joskin DistriTECH is also managed here in Soumagne."

The site is currently expanding. In recent months, 20.000sqm of extra buildings were built, extending the built area on the 15ha terrain to 65.000sqm. Particularly notable are the 2 large automated warehouses. The first one stocks steel sections up to 12m and houses 2 fully automated cutting lasers to cut them. "Since we hadn't many possibilities, we chose to work at height. It is a unique system in Europe. The high tower is designed to stock 4000tons but it will only house 1800tons because we have a lot of hole tubes. Management happens through a control of the operator. The material only has to be loaded by the staff on the cutting robot. The part is then automatically pushed, cut and sorted. The system will be put into service in September", Victor Joskin enthusiastically tells me. "These technical novelties are also providing new possibilities to our developers. Our production method can be improved and therefore be more efficient. The second one will be used to stock parts for which a

Netherlands. Since their legislation on fertilizers had been modified, they then needed our specialized spreading machines. Then, France followed. The most important agricultural country of Europe is still our main purchaser. Germany and Poland are also very good exportation markets. Today, we are regularly exporting, through dealers, to more than 45 countries and sometimes to some other countries. So, we landed, for instance, in South Africa, through Dutch emigrants who keep choosing our tools. In total, we are present in approximately 65 countries." Like previously mentioned, Joskin has also opened other production units outside Belgium. "We have always faced a lack of welders", frankly says Victor Joskin.

"During my visits in Poland in 1988, I had already seen that there were possibilities over there. Ten years later, I really started looking for a place in Poland. This country made me dream. It was a real land of opportunities to reach new markets and

nizing unit was put into service. Moreover, almost all transport inside the company and to thirds is organized from Poland. The site is currently being extended with 12.000sqm of extra built area. "The new production (welding) and logistics departments are expanding. A new powder coating line is also going to be added, next to the two already existing painting lines, one fully automated and the other half-automatic. The aim here is to reduce staff costs thanks to a standardized production and to stocks.

Trust in the future

Even if Victor Joskin has in the meantime reached the age of retirement, he still has projects for the future. "In 2012, we planned to double the turnover in five years time. Today, it seems that we cannot reach this goal. We are at least 2 years late. The difficult market, but also the adventures of the development works on both sites have here a role to play. Our aim is now 2020. Our technicality and our management system will help us to reach this goal. Our production costs can also be reduced. The recent investments in the automation are positive. However, it doesn't mean that staff will be reduced. There will be less employees in comparison to our turnover. By the way, one doesn't have to wait for a good market in order to invest. We really made important investments and we trust the market. There certainly is potential for our material."

To conclude, I asked him what was his best realization until now and this dynamic business manager answered with a smile:

"The most recent one and the one to come. However, I am also really proud of our own galvanizing plant!" ■



In 2011, the Joskin Group put into service its own galvanizing plant in Trzcianka (Poland). Victor Joskin, business manager, is proud of this realization ; he still is considering it as one of his best investments.

large amount is needed as well as big components and parts. Unlike many other companies, Victor Joskin doesn't want to relocate the spare parts department.

Important foreign pillar

The Joskin Group is present worldwide, even if Europe remains of course the biggest market. "Joskin first set up in the

build a new site. There was indeed a desperate lack of (agricultural) machines but there was enough qualified workforce. In the meantime, 340 people are already working on our site of Trzcianka. The simple slurry tankers and muck spreaders as well as the Tetra-Cap tipping trailers and the silage trailers are manufactured there. In 2011, their own galva-