

Frank Bakker

**“Our mist machine saves half of the vegetables that would otherwise be binned”**

By Lucien Hordijk

Frank Bakker (61), managing director of Contronics, developed a mist machine that keeps fruit and vegetables fresh for longer.

You could say that we are specialised in the production of mist. After all those years of research and investment, this may sound futile but that is most certainly not the case. Almost half of all vegetables harvested don't end up on the consumers' plate. Supermarkets and transporters throw away unbelievable quantities of food. With our mist machine this continuous stream of waste can be reduced by 50%.

A crop of iceberg lettuce that has been kept in our misting system can easily be conserved without refrigeration for five days after purchase. This is because the lettuce is actually only harvested the moment it is taken from the shelf by the consumer. By using mist products like vegetables, fruits, and even meats, can be cooled and humidified to keep them fresh for longer. The air in the supermarkets is actually too dry. The vegetables “sweat out” their juices so they become limp and tasteless.

In Europe there are 15,000 Contronics mist systems in operation. We are currently active in thirty countries and serve less than 1% of the market globally. We have no competitors although I wouldn't mind. I'm determined to stay ahead with knowledge, but with competition the market opens up more easily. In the Netherlands most vegetables are still pre-packed so our system is less effective. But we are slowly seeing a shift. I'm proud to report that DekaMarkt is the first supermarket in the Netherlands to install our system. It is a lengthy process but with time we expect to be big in the Netherlands too. After three years of extensive testing, Rewe, one of the largest supermarket chains in Germany, has migrated to our mist machines. 5,000 of their stores are now using our systems.

What one can do with the humidification of water is also possible with other sustainable chemicals. We have developed a humidifier that disinfects the air conditioning systems in cars. Meanwhile we have sold 60,000 of these Aircomatic devices. We are now busy designing a similar device that can disinfect hotel rooms and hospitals. In South Africa we are also testing in underground mines to fight legionella bacteria. We have also applied our high frequency technique to controllers for electrical motors. The CoMoCo device leads to a reduction in energy usage by 90% in electric motors running at a low speed.

Every emerging company has its setbacks and Contronics is no exception. I thought the crisis would pass us by. Still one of our customers left us with 5,000 specially designed Aircomatics. We didn't go to court. I didn't want to fight for 10 years, lose a client and allow the business to deteriorate. Our strength lies in innovative development, not in production. We continued with development of the Aircomatic device and managed to sell the 5,000 pieces, as well as its successor, to the same customer. Eventually it became a massive success but only after we had fought hard for it.

In the end it is fantastic when the hard work is rewarded. We were nominated for the European Business Awards. On June 6<sup>th</sup> in Istanbul, we won first prize for European companies with a turnover up to €25 million. Internationally this is a huge award. With jurors coming from thirty different countries and 15,000 participants it is an enormous honour to win here. A clear recognition of what we are doing and what we want.