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*When it comes to event catering, historical buildings are as much in the frame as modern or particularly stylish ones. The more unusual and the crazier they are, the more attractive they seem.*



## ■ ■ ■ page 38

*Fresh thinking: in our interview Denis Hennequin, President and CEO of McDonald's Europe, talks about future challenges and brand transparency across the company's 40 European markets.*



## front cover ■ ■ ■

*Mouth watering table decoration: Meyer's Koch-Werk cooking & conference in Frankfurt, a high-end event kitchen, demonstrates that peppers & co. look good not only on but also next to the plate.*

Photo: Thomas Fedra

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*The holy month of Ramadan was celebrated recently in the Muslim countries. The way in which hotels and restaurants cater for this period of daytime fasting is one of the subjects of our Middle East section. Plus: focus on Oman.*



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Ruud Meijer,  
General Manager Simplot Europe

# Starter Strategy

## ■ ■ ■ J.R.Simplot Company ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

**Founded** 1952 by John Richard Simplot, born in 1909, who now serves as Chairman Emeritus.

**Corporate status** Privately owned

**Headquarters** Boise, Idaho, USA

**Employees** Approx. 10,000 in the USA, Canada, China, Mexico, and Australia

**Annual sales** about \$3 bn

**Products** Simplot is one of the world's largest frozen-potato processors, annually turning out over 1.35 bn kg of frozen French fries and other potato products worldwide. In the USA, it is also a major processor of corn, peas, broccoli, avocados and carrots and has extensive agribusiness interests.

The Netherlands-based subsidiary of US potato giant J.R.Simplot is pursuing a focused strategy. Its starter and appetiser products – mainly vegetable-based – have been developed to let European QSR and casual dining operators maximise variety and profitability across their menus. Bruce Whitehall reports.

US agribusiness giant the J.R.Simplot Company, with annual sales of around \$3 bn, is one of three companies which control around 80% of the US market for frozen French fries, the others being Lamb Weston and McCain's. However, Simplot's European business, operated in the Netherlands since 1995, has focused on appetizers, 'grabbetisers' and avocado and guacamole products. The company believes this strategy offers significant differentiation over its competitors, by focusing its product de-

velopment energy on the starter and appetiser niche rather than tagging products onto existing potato businesses. "In this way we are much more flexible in meeting our customers' special wishes," points out Ruud H.Meijer, general manager of Simplot Europe. "Throughout the process, we have a personal contact with our customers through all layers of the organisation." Simplot Europe's focus is on filling gaps in quickservice, casual dining and hotel menus, with the help of products –





mainly vegetable-derived – which meet diner expectations for more exotic and ‘trendy’ side dishes, starters and appetisers. The product range currently covers around 25 different kinds of appetizers and eight ‘grabbetizers’, which are defined as on-the-go vegetable-based finger foods. There are four varieties of guacamole products while avocado products are sold as avocado pulp (for use in dressings and sauces), halves, slices and dices. All these products are sold frozen in formats which are easy to portion and prepare.

Primary application is on the ‘starters’ section of menus. Preparation of most appetisers is in the oven or fryer while avocado products, which are also proving popular in sandwich applications, are served cold. Typical users are the main QSR chains and restaurants specialising in ethnic cuisine, particularly Latino, Mediterranean and Tex-Mex. The top 5 products are:

- hot cheese jalapeños
- mozzarella sticks
- onion rings
- extreme supreme guacamole
- guacamole especial

### New product development

Simplot tries to launch at least five new products each year. According to Meijer, these can vary from a new type of guacamole or avocado product to a whole new range of food components. The development of a new product typically can take 6-9 months and involves departments, from R & D to sales, at every layer in the organisation.

“We believe that the European consumer increasingly recognises advantages of avocados as a nutritious, healthy and trendy item in both starters, as a side dish and in dressings. Hence our growing range of options in slices, dices and dressings,” Meijer says. Looking ahead, the company now sees similar scope for developing tropical fruits in convenient frozen appetiser, side-dish and ingredient formats.

From a production standpoint, Simplot Europe does not have factories of its own, preferring instead to contract various co-packers to process products to Simplot’s exacting quality standards and recipes. The company’s Quality Department regularly visits these sites and conducts regular audits. As in the USA,

## ■ ■ ■ Simplot Europe ■ ■ ■

### Established

1995

### Corporate status

Wholly owned subsidiary of J.R. Simplot

### Foodservice products

Appetizers, grabbetizers, guacamole and avocado products, all sold frozen

### Production

Through co-packers working to Simplot standards and specifications

### Distribution

Throughout Europe and the Middle East, mainly via exclusive distributors, plus wholesalers in emergent markets

### Foodservice users

Mostly commercial operators (QSR, hotels and casual dining) split 50% independents, 30% groups, and 20% chains

### Average growth rate

20-25% per year

[www.simplot.nl](http://www.simplot.nl)

Simplot does not operate any farms, either for potatoes or other vegetables. “But we control every step in the supply chain, from field to plate,” Meijer emphasises.

Virtually all products are currently sold to foodservice customers and Simplot Europe’s research and development department can, if required, work closely with customers which seek a private label or customised product.

Latest moves in product development include reducing trans-fats in recipes which require oil, in some cases eliminating them altogether as with zero gram trans-fat French fries in the USA. The company is also now able to source organic products if required by customers. Simplot offices, factories and co-packers have a specific code of ethics which covers our social responsibilities.

Simplot Europe’s special strengths and areas of expertise are summarised by Meijer in the corporate motto: ‘We are on your side’, referring both to the focus on side-dishes and the readiness to help foodservice operators and chefs develop new and trendy appetizers as value-added menu components. ■