

Q&A with Alberto Antolini

Since taking a controlling interest in Cremona, Italy-based Ocrim SpA in 2008, the Antolini family, which had been longtime investors, has been building and expanding upon the company's long history of supplying the global grain milling, handling and processing industries.

Through investments in personnel, technology, and educational programming, Ocrim has grown its global reach and expanded its customer base. The company actively stays on top of the latest trends and makes investments in the latest technology. A 2014 start-up with FMB Eng.In.E., a spin-off company of the University of Parma, has proven useful. FMB Eng.In.E. is operated and run by a group of professors from the university's industrial engineering department. Together, Ocrim and FMB Eng.In.E. are collaborating to develop new technologies.

In a recent interview with *World Grain*, Ocrim Chief Executive Officer Alberto Antolini discussed the company's history, current challenges and investments in the future.

Alberto Antolini. Photos courtesy of Ocrim.

by Meyer Sosland

Ocrim CEO sees bright future for his family-owned company as well as the milling industry

World Grain: What opportunities and challenges are you seeing for the global grain milling industry, and how is Ocrim working to address both?

Antolini: I can surely say that the first challenge I can think about is the way to make Ocrim a leader and reference point for the milling industry. We must continue to invest in research and development in order to achieve this goal, by providing to this sector important economic and human resources. The final objective is to offer our customers the best products and services. Nobody could deny what we have done and built



Ocrim's production department at the port area site in Cremona, Italy.

these last few years. We have shown our efforts at IPACK-IMA 2015 and the new type of machines shown is the real witness of what I'm saying.

World Grain: What concerns are your customers expressing to you, and how are you helping them address their concerns?

Antolini: Our customers' main concern is to receive the highest quality reliable products and to be supported during the production path. In order to satisfy these needs, we have improved our tele-assistance service, the customer service department and supplied our milling school with the best technical teachers.

World Grain: At IPACK-IMA, Annalisa Antolini emphasized the importance of family and continuity across the generations of the Antolini family. I found this interesting. What advantages does being a multi-generation family-owned and operated company afford Ocrim?

Antolini: The first advantage is surely the experience and knowledge. More generally, the role of the father and mother in a family is fundamental since the parents are the figures in charge of the "address" dedicated to the rest of the family. Our children are our mirror, and we must

transmit them the right values, experience, knowledge and teach them how to face problems and bad periods, too.

Ocrim is a big company but also a big family at the same time, and all my family (my wife, daughter and son) feels it. Now Ocrim is led by my father, Primo Antolini, who is the president, my brother Sergio, who is vice-president and by me as chief executive officer. We have considered Ocrim our family since the beginning of this experience, and we believe it's very important to transmit this "message" to the rest of our family. Annalisa, my daughter, at IPACK-IMA, brought this important testimony, and she is conscious of the great labor carried out by her great-grandfather, grandfather, father and uncle, just as Ocrim's actual employees are aware of the labor carried out by the ones who came first.

World Grain: Ocrim proudly emphasizes that its products are Italian made. Please discuss the importance of this to the company's success.

Antolini: We can proudly say that our products are "Italian Made." I mean that all machines (and their components) and products are manufactured inside our headquarters in Cremona, Italy. We

have worked a lot during these years in order to make it possible: all production is carried out "at home," under our control, and I'm not sure that others could declare the same. I think it could be easy to go "outside" where you can find lower costs, but you will surely not ensure the same quality and offer a good product to the customers. Italy is well known everywhere for its high quality and taste, and we want to respect this great tradition.

World Grain: How has the technology and business of the milling industry changed in the last few years and where do you see it going?

Antolini: Technology is moving forward very fast, and we actually do our best in order to follow this "wave." Of course, we do not agree with everything, but we are sure to hold what really is necessary and useful in order to improve our knowledge and competence in the technology field and to apply it in a correct way. During these last years we have improved our automation department, but also other engineering departments that have the aim to research and to be always up to date on what's new in technological field. For example, very important to us is the partnership with some universities and in particular the START-UP between Ocrim and FMB- Eng. In.E., University of Parma, confirming the fact that the company believes and invests in research and development, thus giving opportunities and resources to a sector led by brilliant young minds. Our new Superior Time line of milling equipment is the tactile example of what I am saying, because it is the result of a deep study and constructive collaborations.

World Grain: As you have traveled and spoken with customers across the global milling industry, what have you learned about the different regions and the characteristics of their milling industries?

Antolini: Well, of course, each country has its food habits and these habits influence the type of plants we provide. In addition, the different market trends and laws influence the way of working

and the Ocrim team is able to foresee the needs of the different markets and everybody works in order to satisfy each customer. Each country has different rules and regulations concerning food, materials for food processing machines, and of course concerning the bureaucracy. Ocrim is able to understand, study and face these rules and regulations in order to carry out a correct work from the beginning up to the final test.

World Grain: In which regions of the world are you currently seeing the most growth and in what regions do you see the most potential for future growth?

Antolini: Ocrim is already present everywhere and with great success in the countries of the Gulf region, North America, South America, Central America, Asia with great advancement in the Southeast Asia. Ocrim's presence is very strong in Saudi Arabia thanks to several turnkey formula projects of high economic value. You must know that it is only because of accurate work carried out by the Ocrim team that it has been possible to obtain such important results also in foreign developing countries. Ocrim always conducts an accurate analysis of the markets linked to the milling sector, but also of the political, social, cultural and environmental context of each country.

World Grain: Food safety is an important topic right now in the food processing and grain processing industries. What is Ocrim doing to help its customers address this issue?

Antolini: You have asked this question to the right person, since I can loudly declare that Ocrim has always thought about food safety and has always applied important and innovative strategies. Ocrim was the first company in the milling world to use stainless steel for cereal processing machines construction, and we are very proud of it. RMX and RMX-Q (stainless steel roller mill), with some other machine types, are examples of this important choice. At IPACK-IMA 2015, we launched the

RMI-S of Ocrim Superior Time line that represents several years of hard work by our Research & Development department. We are very proud of the result since the machines of this new line are a real improvement. We have really strengthened Ocrim's existing machines. In fact, RMI-S, for example, is made of three main materials: stainless steel, steel and ABS plastic. This choice of the material is due to Ocrim's attention for food safety.

World Grain: What nutritional and dietary trends are impacting your business and how has Ocrim responded to them?

Antolini: Ocrim every day must face the milling global market and meet the related trends, but I believe that the trend connected to the whole wheat products is the most important one, because of its increasing in terms of consumption and developing in time. Thanks to the several realizations carried out over the years, we are able to satisfy any customers' need. We can proudly say that we have enough experience and competence to supply any kind of plant and machines, from the cleaning line up to different types of milling operations. This allows Ocrim to guide some trends in collaboration with customers caring not only about the whole supply but also the product development.

World Grain: How does Ocrim keep in touch with development of new varieties of wheat that might affect the efficiency of flour mill operations? Forecasts are often heard that genetic modification (GM) will soon come to wheat in the same huge way it has affected corn and soybeans. Does Ocrim have a view on this possibility and are you aware of ways in which GM wheat might require changes in milling?

Antolini: This is a huge and complex topic, and it is not easy to give a short answer. Your question presents two different aspects. Concerning the first case, we are talking about natural grains belonging to an "old school" that we are rediscovering today, because they are full of benefits.

The second case is about the grains destined to "feed the planet." We are constantly working, together with some research and development centers to identify the ways to process them in the best way, and we are trying the right strategies that can reduce the impact, by shortening and simplifying all the processing management. It is not easy, but we are sure this is the right path to take in order to face the possible changing of the raw material.

World Grain: How important has your milling technology school been to the overall success of your company?

Antolini: We consider our school an important reference point of our company, because we believe that training and formation are the basis for a good operation of our customers' milling plants. To manage, adjust and make a milling plant as functional and performing at optimal levels, it is necessary to have skilled and experienced personnel. For this reason, we organize courses "ad hoc" just dedicated to a specific customer and his new milling plant. Ocrim's Milling Technology School is well known all over the world, because every year, here in Cremona, we host a lot of students who attend the courses organized by the Ocrim team and held by our engineers, technologists, technicians, area managers, etc. A pilot mill and a well-equipped laboratory, where our technicians and technologists transmit their competence and knowledge, support the school.

World Grain: How have your feed milling equipment and grain silos divisions been performing?

Antolini: I can proudly say they are performing at their best, and we are strong in both sectors. For example, Grain Silos & Flour Mills Organization (GSFMO) of Saudi Arabia committed us the construction of important grain silos sections and a feed mill, giving us the great opportunity to strengthen our presence in these specific sectors. 

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