

WALLONIA, A LOGISTICS HUB FOR THE AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY



Ideally located in the heart of Europe, infrastructure, multimodality, skills, available space: Wallonia ticks all the boxes necessary for a successful logistics project. What is less well known is that the Walloon region also has many assets for logistics and the transport of perishable goods. SIAL in Paris, the world's leading food industry event, is an opportunity to make this known to the sector's manufacturers.



Space is a rare commodity. The French group STEF, which specializes in the transport and storage of refrigerated food products, has been faced for several years with the

saturation of its warehouses. The constraints on the food industry are constantly increasing, leading more and more manufacturers to outsource their logistics. The group, which already had three sites in Wallonia, Liège, Courcelles and Saintes, decided last spring to build a new 10,000 m² refrigerated warehouse in Tubize. This is a major investment that could create between 50 and 150 additional jobs.

The land reserve is not the only asset that attracts investors. "One of the reasons why we continue to invest in Wallonia is that it is easier to find competent personnel who are ready to accompany us in our development in Belgium," explains Gauthier Morel, Managing Director of STEF Belgium.

Multimodal transport is another of Wallonia's strengths. Connections to road, air, rail and river, with the autonomous port of Liège, which is Belgium's leading inland port and the third largest in Europe.

Jost Group, specialized in air, road and sea transport, customs and forwarding and warehouse logistics, has set up on the site of the Liege trilogiport with a 300,000 m² site. This access to rail and waterways allows it to continue to reduce its CO² emissions. In line with Wallonia's desire to reduce its emissions by 35% by 2030, the Logistics in Wallonia competitiveness cluster encourages its members to participate in multimodal transfer projects (Multimodal Wallonia), innovation projects (Innovation Pitch) or emission reduction programs (Lean & Green).

Air transport, which remains the fastest and safest means of transport to guarantee the freshness of the most fragile products, is not left out either. Liege Airport, the 6th largest airport for freight transport in Europe, has specialized in the transport of this type of goods. 25 countries export perishable products to Liege Airport.

We are talking about cut flowers for example, but especially food products that require controlled temperatures (some between 2° and 8°, others between 15° and 25°). Very delicate foodstuffs, such as asparagus or mangoes which can easily spoil, benefit from modern and perfectly adapted infrastructures. Liege Airport also has a border control post (PCF) called the Fly'in Farm. This is where the veterinarians of the Belgian Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain (FASFC) carry out most of the checks, but they also travel to the airport warehouses every day to carry out their tasks. The airport is in constant contact with veterinarians, importers and transporters to ensure that the entire supply chain is efficient, thus minimizing the risk of loss and damage. The airport has a centralized infrastructure with 11,000 m² divided into 4 large cells with variable temperatures. This is where the goods are dismantled. But for more flexibility, each handler has a veterinary inspection point in his warehouse.

Wallonia also has many companies whose services are aimed directly at operators in the food industry and Horeca customers. This is the case, for example, of Holifresh, a player in the cold chain and currently present at SIAL in Paris. Launched in 2017 in Louvain-la-Neuve, this company offers connected solutions for real-time monitoring of critical parameters (temperature, humidity, CO²). "The sensor installed in a truck or a cold room for example will really monitor the situation in real time and digitize the temperature readings which will then be accessible and easily readable on an online web platform," explains Caroline de Pret, Sales Manager for Belgium and France, from Holifresh's stand at SIAL. "Our sensors work without wifi, which ensures continuous operation and optimal security.

Other Walloon players are also active in the cold chain, such as Bidfood whose largest distribution center in Belgium is based in Thuin. The site has three storage departments: room temperature, positive cold (2 to 4°C) and negative cold (-18°C). Like H. Essers (Courcelles), Sud-Fresh (Rhisnes), also specialized in temperature-controlled transport of food products, all their vehicles are equipped with two separate compartments, allowing the simultaneous transport of temperature-controlled products in positive and negative cold.

Sud-Fresh has 4 logistics distribution centers for storage. Products that are very sensitive to temperature and that should not have temperature shocks can be placed in quarantine. Packaging at different temperatures is possible (e.g. chocolate).

In addition to transport and storage under controlled temperatures, these companies also provide all the services of reverse logistics, i.e. the return of goods, which is an integral part of the logistic cycle of this type of products.

In addition to cold storage, many Walloon companies also provide a complete transport and logistics service for goods, including food products that do not require the maintenance of the cold chain. We can mention Brauntruck AG (Eupen), Vincent Logistics (Herstal), Van Mieghem Logistics (Saintes), Garsou-Angenot (Thimister-Clermont) or Magetra (Eupen, Hermalle-sous-Huy and Bierset), which specializes in the transport and logistics of wine and all its by-products, such as corks, delicatessen items or other spirits.

Storage space, access facilities, multimodality, state-of-the-art services and cold chain experts, there is everything you need from Wallonia to ensure food distribution in the best conditions. Several international food players were in any case seduced at SIAL by the region's logistics ecosystem.

For more information, please feel free to contact Euracem or the experts in logistics at AWEX (logistics@awex.be)