

The constant journey of discovery of Ben van Roosmalen (KSE)

# From hammer mill to windmill

**On December 1st, technical consultant Ben van Roosmalen hung up his hat at KSE in Bladel (NL), hereby concluding a career of over 30 years in the animal nutrition industry. Van Roosmalen remains connected with mills as he is currently in training to become a voluntary miller at the local mill in Hapert.**



This vintage Alfra scale will continue to remind Ben van Roosmalen of his career at KSE Alfra even after he retires.



The corn milled at the Hapert mill is supplied by one of Ben van Roosmalen's relations in the animal feed branch.

Ben van Roosmalen started his career in 1987 as a PLC programmer at Stork Alfa. After the acquisition by KSE, he joined the company and never left. Until December 1st, 2021, the official date of his retirement. "I have worked there for exactly 34 years," says van Roosmalen. He looks back on a wonderful period, during which he became attached to the animal nutrition industry domestically and especially abroad. "When I started in this business, I had nothing to do with animal feed and did not know of the existence of hammer mills. The only mill I did have anything to do with was a wind-driven grain mill. We took our wedding photos at the post mill in Geffen at the time," laughs the technical consultant.

### Engineering

Van Roosmalen has a heart for technology, more specifically for automation. After secondary vocational education, he attended college in the evenings. Working during the day, in the evening hours he dove into his textbooks to further master himself in programming. "In the late 80s, early 90s, automation in the factory continued. Our profession changed," the consultant recalls. One of the most memorable automation

jobs for van Roosmalen and his colleagues, was to develop automated dosing slides. "They have a rhythm, the so-called open position and stroke. We translated that rhythm into an algorithm and then converted it into Javascript. This is how our first automated dosing system 'ODR' came into existence. Manual settings were a thing of the past. The system was installed for a Danish customer in 1995. And the great thing is: it is still running perfectly on a very old machine." At the time, we considered to file for a patent for the system, but this was waived. "Instead, we made the algorithm in such a way that only we can read it."

### Feed

Van Roosmalen has seen the inside of many a feed mill. "I always found it important to walk through the factory myself and hear from the people on the floor how things are going and what is or isn't working'." Experience has learnt the consultant that information from the floor does not always fully get through to those who make decisions about equipment to be purchased, automation or process adjustments. "By sitting in the operator's chair, seeing what they see, hearing and feeling and experiencing

how they work, you are able to give better advice to the customer."

Although he had no affinity for animal feed at the start of his career, he gained this knowledge. "To give good advice on dosing and weighing, you must understand the process. You must know which components are being processed, in what quantities and what characteristics these components have", van Roosmalen explains. Partly due to his knowledge and insight, the groundwork was laid to make bulk weighers OIML approved, with a piece of software approved by the NMI (Dutch Institute for Metrology). "Those kinds of aspects are important to be able to develop yourself and remain enthusiastic about what you do. That way you also grow with your company."

### Change

Over time, van Roosmalen's role changed. After a period of working as a programmer, he was appointed team leader. Then he became project manager and since 2008 he fulfilled the role of technical consultant. His knowledge and skills from all the previous years came together in this position. Knowledge of machine control, database and process >>



Twice a month, Ben van Roosmalen can be found at the Hapert mil as a voluntary miller.

flows and electrical engineering and all the previous combined, van Roosmalen brought to his consultancy appointments. “I am not really a salesman, but mainly an advisor. Searching together with the customer for the right solution to his plant’s issues, that’s where my strength lies.”

This quality took van Roosmalen to feed manufacturers all over the world, usually with someone from the sales team. “My technical knowledge, combined with my experience as a programmer, meant that I often approached the situation from a slightly different angle. That sometimes resulted in solutions that were just non-standard but offered exactly what the customer was asking for.” Van Roosmalen feels that his career has been a constant journey of discovery. “There were new challenges around every corner. Being cheaper has been an important motive in the branch, but also anticipating innovation in automation or feed composition.”

### Solutions

For the consultant, however, the maxim ‘not everything that is possible, should or must therefore be executed’ applies. “When giving advice, I do take into account what the possibilities are on

site. If you build in a system, the staff must be able to use it. State-of-the-art automation has no added value if there is no staff to operate it.” Those constraints are fewer today than they used to be, van Roosmalen realizes. “In the past, you really had to solve problems in automation on site. Nowadays, we can dial in remotely and help the customer solve plant issues. That has definitely been a huge advance over the past few years.” This technology has also proven itself abundant in the covid19 era when travel restrictions made it impossible visit customers in-person.

### Transfer

Although his retirement age had been a point on the horizon for some time, the covid19 pandemic also caused van Roosmalen himself to reflect. “I couldn’t travel and had to work from home. I had actually never been at home that much. Surprisingly, my wife and I liked being together.” Moreover, that period helped him with what he finds most difficult: taking distance and handing over responsibility. “My successor Bart van den Brand joined the company a year ago. We have been able to work together a lot during that time and I have gained the confidence that things will

work out, even if I am not behind the steering wheel.”

Fortunately for van Roosmalen, the borders re-opened just in time to do a farewell tour of valued customers together with van den Brand. He keeps particularly fond memories of a final visit to Scandinavia. “I always like to visit that region. Maybe because my first big project was in Norway’.”

### Mill

Ties with KSE have not yet been severed, van Roosmalen assures. “They can always call with question,” he jokes. And he will still come through the door every now and then. If only to get the corn he has stored there. Every first and third Saturday the corn is milled in the Hapert mill, for which van Roosmalen is currently in training as a voluntary miller. To obtain this degree, he must work a sufficient number of hours at the mill, in Hapert as well as at other mills. “The current miller has a gluten allergy. He kept the mill running, but he did not grind. I arranged for corn through my animal feed network, so now we can grind real grain again.”

In addition, van Roosmalen is putting a lot of time into any restorations that are needed to preserve the mill. In March 2022, he hopes to take the official miller’s exam. “If I pass that, I can operate the mill myself,” he says. Some of his KSE relations have already indicated that they will visit the mill at their own leisure, for example when they are in the Netherlands for a visit to the Victam event. “It would be nice to welcome them here as miller of the Hapert mill,” he says.