



€110,-



Henri Willig

FOUNDER HENRI WILLIG CHEESE & MORE

“From dairy farm to a world famous cheese company”

Whether you visit Henri Willig's cheese farms just outside the city or you stop by for a cheese tasting at the Proefzolder: it's an experience you wouldn't dare to miss. Henri Willig's Cheese started out as a small family dairy farm called Jacobs Hoeve and grew to become a 50 million euro a year business. Henri Willig started making cheese about forty years ago and tells us all about his prize-winning company.

Henri Willig (67) arrives for the interview by bicycle. His house is right next to the famous cheese farm Jacobs Hoeve in Katwoude, a little north of Amsterdam. He was born and raised here and took over the dairy farm from his parents shortly after he married his wife Riet. He tells his story: 'I could've never been only a dairy farmer. I am always looking to learn something new and I keep seeing opportunities. I took different courses all the time, so I also learned how to make cheese.'

“What started out as a small family dairy farm grew to become a 50 million euro a year business.”

Innovation

'From that moment on, so many new opportunities to innovate came along. For example, the cheese vat we had couldn't turn the cheeses to dry automatically. I really wanted to find out a way to do this. When I finally found a way, I was so excited that I woke up my wife Riet at midnight to show her. She didn't really appreciate me

waking her up over a new invention,' laughs Henry. 'But,' he continues, 'I think this shows how much I love and loved my work. To have joy in what you do on a daily basis is the most important thing in the world. I personally get a lot of joy out of finding out what works best. So, we tried a lot of different things. Some of it failed and some of it worked. To me that is the essence of being an entrepreneur. The newest thing we just added to our farm is the self-guided tour that people can take on our farm.'

The fire

'Sometimes things go wrong that you don't have control over.' 'Our big thing was a huge fire in 1985. You could see the fire from an afar. I got the call that the cheese workplace was on fire and all I could think was: 'Is my family ok?' I saw my son next to me. I had just got off the phone with my wife and I knew my other sons were with her. I was relieved, because everything that is material is replaceable. It was difficult, because it was right at the start of the tourist season. That was one of our most important revenues. But we just got back to work, what else can you do? It also made us think of starting more shops in the city.'

A cheese experience

To taste the famous cheese inside the city, it is best to go to "de Proefzolder" (which means Tasting Attic in Dutch). Right in the centre, next to the famous 'Tuschinski' theatre, there is the Proefzolder. A lady named Barbara explains the entire cheese-making process. She is completely clothed in traditional Dutch attire. For only 50 euros you can enjoy a cheese and wine tasting, or even a special beer selected to go with the cheese. In only 45 minutes

you'll have a great overview of how cheese is made and hear all about the company's history. It's a great place to just sit down for a few minutes when you're tired of walking through the city. On the farms, there is a new movie showing the process of making cheese. They even have a lovely green-coloured cheese and a new flavour called cocoonet cheese.

“To taste the famous Henri Willig cheese in Amsterdam, it is best to go to de Proefzolder.”

Henri Willig is proud of what he has accomplished, but the most important thing to him is: 'I really love what I did and what I do. You spend so many hours working, so you better like it. That is what I've always said to everyone I work with. I don't think I'll get bored being in retirement. I have a lot of hobbies. He points to his motorcycle: 'I'm making a trip in the States by Harley Davidson motorbike in October. I think it is important to keep seeing other countries and doing new things. I love to do and learn new things, so I hope our visitors also have the experience of learning something they didn't know before.'

J JACOBS HOEVE
Hoogedijk 8, Katwoude
henriwillig.com

P PROEFZOLDER
Reguliersveststraat 24
proefzolder.nl