Bioenergy Insight spoke to Kevin Vandewalle, sales director at VYNCKE, who gave a comprehensive picture of its business model, its agility during challenging times and ongoing technological innovations

VYNCKE: Family-owned business with global presence

VYNCKE was established in 1912 in Flanders by Louis Vyncke, a blacksmith by trade. As Flanders' flax industry was flourishing by the 1920s, so demand for steam boilers grew — to generate energy to remove flax fibres from their stalks. Coal was expensive, and these boilers were designed to burn flax straw waste. The company expanded rapidly.

In 2002 Peter and Dieter Vyncke took over the family business, now in its fourth generation. Headquartered in Harelbeke, the organisation has over 380 employees spanning the globe. *Bioenergy Insight* was curious to know how the business had thrived for so long, and what it perceived to be the industry's greatest challenges.

Vandewalle explained that VYNCKE's business model has remained quite unchanged since it started 110 years ago. Its business operation involves going to industries and transforming a process waste flow they have into a solution for their energy needs.

For Vandewalle, the current-day context remains much better than it was 110 years ago, but key obstacles remain. One of these concerns was high governmental focus on renewable electricity. The effect of this has been "a lot of subsidies for utility power plants to burn biomass to become more green [causing] a strange set up in some biomass supply markets, because we are transporting fuel or biomass halfway across the world."

Project in Ghana: a full scope cogeneration plant for the growing energy demands of the palm oil mills and refineries of this palm oil producer

One result of this has been heightened opposition to biomass, noted Vandewalle, with the new RED III directive imposing possible restrictions upon subsidising projects burning primary woody biomass, which consists of forestry residues.

Such opposition does make sense for Vandewalle, who emphasised the challenge acts as an opportunity for the company too. The organisation has always tackled biomass waste streams that are more challenging, and it has been prepared for these circumstances. Vandewalle added that it is important to consider under-utilised biomass waste streams, as well as decentralised plants — using biomass waste at the location where it is being disposed.

The EU's stricter emissions regulations could also make smaller capacity biomass-to-energy projects economically unviable, continued Vandewalle. One solution to that is for best available technologies to be "framed towards the scale of a project both economically and technically".

New developments

In terms of new developments at VYNCKE, Vandewalle told *Bioenergy Insight* the company is drastically expanding its solution portfolio. It took a step into waste-to-energy a couple of years ago — an area for which the firm sees a high demand. It is also developing engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) projects on a larger scale, predominantly in Europe.

It is continuing to expand into new geographies too, having opened an office in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, in March 2022 — meaning the firm is looking into developing in high-growth geographies.

Another notable change from a company development perspective has been the introduction of a non-Vyncke family member as CEO — Stefaan Lauwers, who was appointed to the role in October 2021. The brothers Peter and Dieter Vyncke, with the help of the holding company, are driving the family business into a proactive industrial group, but still with the view on a sustainable future, Vandewalle said.

> "Peter and Dieter Vyncke are driving the family business into a proactive industrial group, but still with the view on a sustainable future"

Emerging economies

Bioenergy Insight asked Vandewalle whether the company experiences differences working with countries that have developing economies. He replied that there is definitely a difference, and that both worlds are quite different.

He explained that, in Europe, the majority of its business is subsidised,