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NÅR BÆREDYGTIGHED

IKKE ER ET MODEFÆNOMEN

When sustainability is more than just a fashion statement



Hos Axel Månsson er bæredygtighed en dybfølt tro på, at det giver mest mening og størst sundhed. Den filosofi har givet den midtjyske gartner et stærkt navn inden for fødevarerproduktion. Nu udvider han koncernen med hoteldrift og restaurant.

Af Anne Krøjgaard

Passion, visioner og en konstant lyst til at blive bedre har altid været karaktertræk hos Axel Månsson fra Brande.

Det stod allerede klart, da han som knægt kørte med byens mælkekusk og blev siddende på vognen, selv når de andre drenge hoppede af efter kort tid. Og da han som 10-årig begyndte at gå til hånd hos sin skolelærerindes mand, som var

landmand. Han fodrede kalve og læssede roer op - og brugte stort set al sin fritid på landet. Og det var ikke pengene, der var drivkraften, selv om der røg en skilling af ind imellem. Det var hans fuldstændig grænseløse interesse for dyr og landbrug, der drev ham. En interesse der blev til en uddannelse som landmand og job som fodermester på to gårde allerede som 17-årig.

Som 20-årig købte Axel Månsson maskiner og en besætning på 16 malkekøer, 40 fedesvin og 300 høns, mens han lejede jorden. Siden er bedriften vokset til cirka 1.600 hektar, 230.000 økologiske æglæggende høns og Danmarks største producent af icebergsalat, mens han også leverer grøntsager til eksempelvis Dubai, Grønland og Italien.

- Stilstand er som bekendt tilbagegang. Så det ser jeg slet ikke som en mulighed, ler Axel Månsson, når man spørger

ham, om hans koncern bare skal blive ved med at vokse. I dag har han foruden ægge- og grøntsagsproduktion også gårdbutik, stort biogasanlæg, gårdcafé, bageri og en voksende kursusvirksomhed, der byder på møde- og konferencelokaler med plads til op til 300 gæster, mulighed for rundvisning, workshops, samt kokke-masterclass. Desuden har han netop investeret i det lokale Hotel Dalgas i Brande, hvor sønnen Asger har ansvaret for driften.

- Tanken er, at vi på hotellet og restauranten kan binde tingene sammen; menukortet er i tråd med det, vi producerer på gården, så vi kan udnytte synergien og slå et slag for lokalt producerede råvarer, siger han og forklarer, at man gerne vil holde på både basis-hotelgæsterne, de lokale, som kommer og spiser – og samtidig tiltrække nye kunder.

Derfor har han ansat køkkenchefen Aske Munk Lundquist, der har arbejdet blandt andet i Meyers Køkkener og hos restaurant Frederiksgade 42, og som sammen med to kokke og en sommelier skal stå i spidsen for den gastronomiske side af hotellet.

Sund jord – sunde planter – sundt liv

Virkelyst og en innovativ tankegang har således været en stor *driver* i opbygningen af Månsson A/S.

- Vi har lavet grøntsager i knap 40 år; da vi begyndte, var der mange producenter, små gartnere og familievirksomheder. Markedet er blevet presset og måden, kæderne køber ind, har ændret sig. Vi formåede at flytte os, så vi fik tilpas volumen og blev leveringssikre. Og ret hurtigt både på økologiske og konventionelle varer, fortæller Axel Månsson, der måske især er kendt for sine økologiske varer, som blandt andet flere af landets Michelin-kokke efterspørger.

- Vi startede med økologi i 1998. Dengang var der en række produkter, som man ikke mente, kunne lade sig gøre at producere økologisk, men som vi har i dag. Vi har nok bare aldrig være nervøse for at prøve nye ting af, forsøge at forbedre os og gøre mere. Det er en del af vores DNA. Det har kostet penge, men også gjort os til *first movers* på mange ting, forklarer han og tilføjer, at han gerne vil vækste endnu mere på økologi med et bredere sortiment.

- Ikke fordi det er blevet moderne at være bæredygtig, men ganske enkelt fordi vi synes, det giver mening og er det rigtige at gøre. For os er bæredygtighed sund jord, der danner basis for gode og sunde planter. Når der er liv i jorden og balancen er i orden, har planterne nemmere ved at optage de næringsstoffer, der skal til for at planten er sund. Dermed får planten et bedre immunforsvar over for svampe, insekter og andet, forklarer han og fortsætter:

- Vi tror på, at en plante, der er vokset op i god jord, er bedre for os at spise. Når man spiser en god og sund plante, bliver man også selv sund og glad. Desuden indeholder planten flere antioxidanter og andet godt, når den er økologisk. Så det giver bare mening! Og så hænger det hele jo sammen med jordens frugtbarhed, bæredygtighed, madspild og klima.

Biogas og friske forarbejdede grøntsager

Men det er ikke bare i forhold til grøntsagerne, at Axel Månsson er visionær og bæredygtighedspassionen skinner igennem. Faktisk har han en vision om at blive selvforsynende med næringsstoffer for at slutte den økologiske cyklus. Et biogasanlæg, som han har etableret sammen med Nature Energy, omdanner forskellige biomasser, hvor af en stor del

er økologisk blandt andet fra hans egne høns, til grøn gas til opvarmning af cirka 12.000 husstande. Anlægget blev tredoblet i løbet af 2020.

- Den afgassede biomasse bruger vi som værdifuld gødning til grøntsagerne. Vi har fokus på bæredygtighed i alle led af produktionen. Og vi bruger gerne den nyeste teknologi, eksempelvis indenfor ukrudtsbekæmpelse og i vores grøntsagspakkeri, forklarer Axel Månsson. Eksempelvis benytter virksomheden monitoring og analyser, som sikrer effektiv udnyttelse af de tilførte ressourcer og fuld sporbarhed.

- Vi bestræber os konstant på at sikre vores kunder friske kvalitetsprodukter, som er produceret under størst mulig hensyntagen til miljø og klima i alle led, siger han og understreger, at Månsson A/S slet ikke er færdig med at udvikle sig.

- Nej da, vi vil gerne endnu længere. Eksempelvis med vores convenience-produkter. Hele, skrællede løg har været en del af sortimentet i mange år, og dette segment vil vi gerne udvikle. Som noget ret nyt har vi skrællede løg i tern og ringe. Men i det hele taget vil vi gerne kunne tilbyde endnu mere snitgrønt. Allerhelst så det er høstet om morgenen og ude hos supermarkederne om eftermiddagen. Der er masser af muligheder, men vi er nødt til at tænke i andre baner end kerneforretningen: Vi kan ikke producere flere grøntsager end folk kan spise. Så i stedet skal vi udvikle kerneforretningen i andre og nye retninger. Med nye grene og sideskud.



Axel Månsson has a heartfelt belief that sustainability is simply the most sensible and healthy option for us all, and the planet. That philosophy has earned the gardener from the Central Denmark Region a good name within food production. And now, he is expanding the business by getting into hotel management and running a restaurant.

By Anne Krøjgaard

Passion, vision and a constant drive to do better have always been the characteristics that distinguish Axel Månsson from Brande. This difference was already clear when, as a boy, he rode along with the town's milkman and stayed on the wagon, even when all the other boys jumped off after a short while. And when, as a 10-year-old, he started working for his schoolteacher's husband who was a farmer. He fed cattle and loaded beets and spent practically all of his time in the countryside. And it wasn't money that was the driving force behind this hard work, even though he did earn a penny here and there. It was his unfettered interest in animals and farming that drove him. This interest led him to train as a farmer and take on a job as a cowherd on two farms when he was only 17.

At age 20, Axel Månsson bought machinery and a herd of 16 dairy cows, 40 fattening pigs and 300 chickens, while leasing the grounds on which to keep them. Since then, the business has grown into around 1,600 hectares, 230,000 organic laying hens and is Denmark's largest producer of iceberg lettuce. He also ships vegetables to Dubai, Greenland and Italy, among other countries.



- Stagnation is, as you know, the same as decline. So, I don't even see that as an option, Axel Månsson says while laughing, when you ask him if his business will just keep on growing. Today, apart from the egg and vegetable production, he also has a farm shop, a large biogas facility, a farm café, a bakery and a growing business offering courses with meeting and conference rooms that can seat up to 300 guests, runs tours, workshops and a chef's masterclass. He also just invested in a local hotel in Brande, Hotel Dalgas, where his son, Asger, is in charge of the daily management.

- The idea is to combine things at the hotel and the restaurant; the menu is in line with what we produce at the farm, so we can exploit that synergy and promote locally-produced goods, he says and he explains that they want to keep the regular hotel guests who come and dine, but also attract new customers. This is precisely why he hired chef Aske Munk Lundquist, who worked at Meyers Køkkener and at restaurant Frederiksgade 42, and who together with two other chefs and a sommelier will be in charge of gastronomy at the hotel.

Healthy earth – healthy plants – healthy life

In this way, entrepreneurial and innovative thinking has been an important ingredient in the creation of Månsson A/S.

- We have produced vegetables for almost 40 years; when we started, there were many producers, small gardeners and family businesses. The market is under pressure and the way the chains buy has changed. We managed to progress and adapt the volume and we can provide security of delivery. And we can do this rather fast, both with organic and conventional produce, says Axel Månsson, who is probably best known for his organic goods which are in demand among the country's Michelin chefs.

- We started with organic farming in 1998. Back then, there were a number of producers who did not think it was possible to produce organically in the way we do today. I guess, we were just never nervous about trying new things, trying to improve and do more. It is a part of our DNA. It has cost money, but it has also made us first movers on a lot of things, he explains and adds that he would like to grow even more with a wider range of organic produce.

- Not because it has become fashionable to be sustainable, but simply because we think that it makes sense and is the right thing to do. To us, sustainability means a healthy earth that forms the basis for good and healthy plants. When the earth is alive, and the balance is right, it is easier for plants to absorb the nutrients

required to be healthy. This will also provide the plants with a better immune defence against fungi, insects, etc. he explains and continues:

- We believe that a plant that was grown in good soil is better for us to eat. When you eat a good and healthy plant, you also become healthy and happy. In addition, the plant contains more antioxidants and other good ingredients when it is organic. So, it just makes sense! And it all goes hand in hand: the soil's fertility, sustainability, food waste and climate.

Biogas and freshly processed vegetables

However, it is not just on the topic of vegetables that Axel Månsson is a visionary with a passion for sustainability. He actually has a dream of becoming self-sufficient on nutrients to complete the organic cycle. A biogas facility, which he established with Nature Energy, transforms various biomass of which a large part is organic, for example from his own chickens, into green gas for heating around 12,000 homes. The facility tripled in size during 2020.

- We use the degassed biomass as valuable fertiliser for the vegetables. We focus on sustainability in all steps of the production. And we prefer to use the latest technology, for example, within pre-emergent weed control and in our vegetable packaging, Axel Månsson explains. For example, the company uses monitoring and analysis that ensure efficient use of the added resources and provide complete traceability.

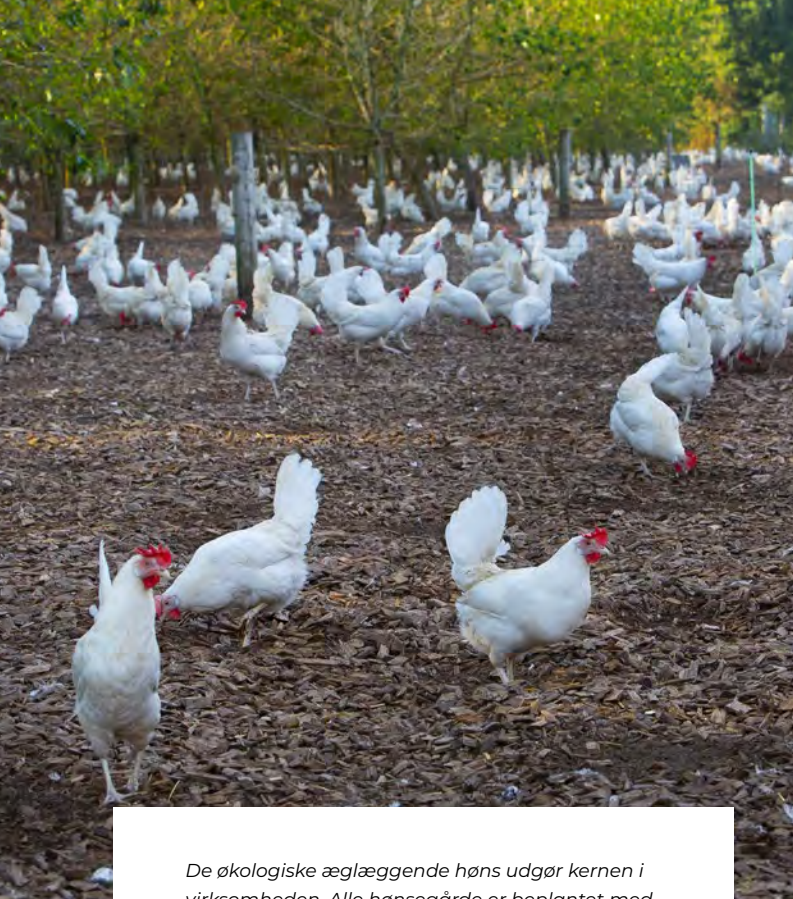
- We constantly strive to ensure that our customers have fresh quality produce, which is produced with the highest possible consideration to the environment and climate in all steps of the production, he says and highlights that Månsson A/S has not finished developing.

- No, not at all, we want to go even further. For example, with our convenience products. Whole, peeled onions have been part of the range for many years, and we would like to develop this segment. As something rather new, we have peeled onions that are diced and sliced into rings. But overall, we want to be able to offer more sliced greens. Preferably, so that everything is harvested in the morning and in the supermarkets in the afternoon. There are plenty of possibilities, but we have to think about alternatives to the core business: we can only produce as many vegetables as people can eat. So, instead we have to develop the core business in other and new directions. Like growing new branches and offshoots.

*Axel Månssons
økologiske grøntsager
høstes på lager i oktober
og sælges herfra i løbet
af vinteren*

*Axel Månsson's organic
vegetables are harvested
and stored in October
and are sold from here
throughout the winter.*





De økologiske æglæggende høns udgør kernen i virksomheden. Alle hønsegårde er beplantet med skov for hønsenes trivsel.

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These organic elements make up the core of the business. All of our chicken farms have outdoor range space for the wellbeing of the hens.



Axel Månsson A/S er en af de mest innovative producenter af økologiske grøntsager og økologiske æg i Skandinavien. Axel Månsson har produceret grøntsager og æg i mere end 40 år, og sortimentet bliver løbende udvidet. Axel Månsson A/S er Danmarks største producent af icebergsalat men producerer også et meget bredt sortiment af andre grøntsagskulturer såsom løg, hjertesalat, bladselleri, broccoli, spidskål, hvidkål, grønkål, fennikel, pak choi og mange andre, hvoraf størsteparten kun dyrkes økologisk. Axel Månsson A/S råder i dag også over gårdbutik, bageri og konferencefaciliteter på gården, samt hotel i Brande by. Axel Månsson A/S beskæftiger 50 medarbejdere.

Læs mere om Månssons gårdbutik på side 11.



Axel Månsson A/S is one of the most innovative producers of organic vegetables and eggs in Scandinavia. Axel Månsson has produced vegetables and eggs for 40 years, and the range is expanded continuously. Axel Månsson A/S is Denmark's largest producers of iceberg lettuce, but also produces a wide range of other vegetable crops, such as onions, mini romaine lettuce, celery, broccoli, pointed cabbage, white cabbage, kale, fennel, pak choi and many others, of which the majority are organically grown. Today, Axel Månsson A/S also includes a farm shop, bakery and conference facilities at the farm, as well as a hotel in the city of Brande. Axel Månsson A/S employees 50 people.

Read more about Månsson's farm shop on page 11.