

# A TRADITIONAL HIGH QUALITY NAME WITH A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

## The Hefebank Weihenstephan – An interview with Dr Fritz Briem

*The whole purpose of the Hefebank is not the new development of yeast, but its focus on cultivating and offering existing well established yeast strains that have been used in the German and international industry brewing as well as the food and the drinks businesses. The variety of cultivated yeast strains that are stored at the Hefebank Weihenstephan are examined and researched with the most modern analytical methods and are identified genetically and technologically.*

*The name Hefebank Weihenstephan has stood a very close association with the university institution of the TU Munich-Weihenstephan for nearly four decades. The original Hefebank Weihenstephan that has the right to bear the name legally, has been known as the origin of isolation of the cultivated pure yeast strains. Therefore the marketing rights as well as the original isolates have been officially handed over to Dr Fritz Briem. BREWING AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY INTERNATIONAL would like to interview Dr Fritz Briem concerning the background and possible further interesting facts.*

### **BREWING AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY INTERNATIONAL:**

*Dr Briem, would you be so kind as to explain the essential facts about the Hefebank Weihenstephan?*

**Dr Fritz Briem:** The Hefebank Weihenstephan was and has always been a private enterprise in terms of the commercial aspect towards the brewing industries

as well as marketing and selling of well established pure cultivated yeast strains. Due to past special agreement together with a permit and authorisation the earlier professors holding the professorship at the Technical University (TU) of Munich-Weihenstephan were authorised to then sell off the business units to the next generation of professorship.

**BBII:** *Nevertheless the last time this was not the case?*

**Dr Briem:** That is correct. The last proprietor of the Hefebank Weihenstephan was Prof Donhauser who subleased the establishment to his successor Prof Geiger. As the Hefebank Weihenstephan was under lease and not sold to Prof Geiger, the future of the Hefebank Weihenstephan was therefore not exactly certain. Due to the fact that Prof Geiger retired one year ago, the situation was very difficult for all parties involved.

As the only shareholder that had the authority to sell the Hefebank Weihenstephan was Prof Donhauser.



*The Hefebank Weihenstephan will be a service provider of the original Weihenstephaner pure yeast cultivated strains with the trade mark. This statement from Dr Fritz Briem (middle) was handed over to Wolfgang Burkart (left), Managing director of Verlag W. Sachon and Andreas Hofbauer, editor of BREWING AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY INTERNATIONAL.*

The whole business concept together with the trade marked pure cultivated yeast strains along with their rights were offered to the TU Munich represented by Prof Hermann.

**BBII:** *Dr Briem, that means that the calculated market value that was confirmed by an experienced and qualified official chartered accountant was paid for the traditional name Hefebank Weihenstephan along with the trademarked rights?*

**Dr Briem:** One could say that is exactly what it is all about. As the original and traditional Hefebank was established in 1940 by its original founder Prof Weinfurter who isolated according to the character and who for example appointed the cultivated pure yeast strains with the names W34/70 or W34/78. As an appointed private enterprise, the brewing businesses and industry were offered the quality yeast strains. As a result to this enterprise agreement, the TU Munich-Weihenstephan was provided the yeast strains for research purposes.

” *Our aim is to employ pure yeast cultivated strains that means to characterise the existing yeast strains and to obtain the necessary scientific information necessary for optimisation.”*

**BBII:** *Therefore if I understand correctly, there was no final agreement upon the negotiations between the TU Munich-Weihenstephan and the negotiation partners or institutes involved?*

**Dr Briem:** Unfortunately not! I presume the TU Munich was not interested in the package that was offered together with the Hefebank Weihenstephan or should I say at least not for the calculated price that was offered at the negotiation. Therefore the leased premises at the TU Munich were terminated at a very short notice by the University administration. At this point I was then brought into the negotiation and decided to invest and purchased the trade mark rights of the Hefebank Weihenstephan along with the original genesis isolated pure

*“With the purchase of the Hefebank Weihenstephan my intention was to support Prof Donhauser literally as an emotional binding and in another sense to keep the brewing culture”, stressed Dr Fritz Briem.*



yeast strains and merged the German registered trade name as Hefebank Weihenstephan GmbH.

As soon as the company was merged, it was announced that the TU Munich-Weihenstephan was more than interested in the purchase nevertheless not at the normal market value conditions that was offered. Then it was announced that the research centre at the TU Munich was selling yeast strains as a competitor on the market. My only comment towards this decision is “A Life Science”. Competitors are always welcome especially in the global village of today’s business world.

**BBII:** *Dr Briem, please let us know the main reason for your interest, investment and purchase of the Hefebank Weihenstephan?*

**Dr Briem:** An emotional background played a very important role towards my final decision and that the wranglings taking place during the negotiations were not exactly negotiated as honestly as one would expect from a state run organisation. Nevertheless those facts are not that important and are not worth being mentioned.

The purchase of the Hefebank Weihenstephan was also an enormous support towards my Ph D advisor and after many years of working together my close friend Prof Donhauser who was at that point very disappointed about the behaviour and possible dirty tactics of several colleagues that evoked during the original negotiations. I therefore opted, as the highest bidder, to purchase the Hefebank Weihen-

stephan with the main intention of preserving the brewing culture as well as to keep the heritage which has been built up during the traditional personal union of nearly four generations. The formerly known technical microbiological and technological chair brewery II along with the testing laboratory was directed by professors who were concerned about issues that the brewing industry possibly may have and who always focused on the identification and differentiation of their immediate needs.

That is exactly what I am continuing and aiming to support with a unique and sustainable business concept.

” *The Weihenstephaner pure cultivated yeast strains can only be sold under Hefebank Weihenstephan GmbH.”*

**BBII:** *Would the assets and yeast strain inventory have been endangered if you did not purchase the Hefebank Weihenstephan?*

**Dr Briem:** I believe yes! With the simple fact that no one felt responsible for the customers needs. Especially once the premises were terminated and no alternative was given. It seemed to be a danger for the future of the company as Prof Geiger was not in a very healthy state during the termination period of the premises. Therefore his presence seemed to be sporadic at the professorship during a bumpy ride for the decision makers.

This obviously created a situation without professional responsibility and the correct organisational and financial support needed to run a high quality establishment such as the Hefebank Weihenstephan. It may sound bizarre that due to the escalation of many issues amongst the decision makers the Hefebank Weihenstephan was rescued.

**BBII:** *In what function are you directing the Hefebank Weihenstephan today?*

**Dr Briem:** We as a service provider would like to offer to the brewing industry the original trade marked cultivated pure yeast strains inoculated from the original cultures and to concentrate on yeast strains as in the past decades. That was the basic and main intention of the Hefebank Weihenstephan founders in the past and still to this day.

**BBII:** *What about consulting?*

**Dr Briem:** We won't offer brewery consulting. The consulting has to be strictly separated due to the conflict of interest. The main function of the Hefebank Weihenstephan as a supplier and deposit of pure yeast cultures one is then seen as a raw materials supplier. The supplier is obliged to know his product and his experience and qualified knowledge is requested. As a supplier every brewery is a potential future customer that alone creates issues as to neutral consultation with the sense of a technological independence that can create difficulties within the assistance needed.

The main interest of a raw materials supplier differentiates itself from the experience and expertise of a consulting technical engineer. They are two completely different business units. I am well aware that in the pure yeast strain business a constant consultation is necessary upon individual demand.

**BBII:** *Dr Briem, can you distinguish your position between these two business units clearly?*

**Dr Briem:** That is not easy to do, as I have been consulting in the past in an active brewing environment. Therefore I have had to consider a solution that suits the brewing industries needs and I have employed a well



*The team of the Hefebank Weihenstephan: Josef Schraml, technical director, Gabriele Knäbl (left), laboratory staff member und Melanie Geppert, laboratory assistant.*

experienced graduate brewing engineer Mr Josef Schraml who has plenty of diverse international brewing experience as the technical director of the Hefebank Weihenstephan. He can support all the needs and demands of the industry and consult on the spot accordingly.

**”** *The branding of the Hefebank Weihenstephan stands for German quality and that will be pushed without the University.”*

**BBII:** *Apart from the laboratory director?*

**Dr Briem:** Our team consists of a laboratory staff member that we employed who was originally from the Hefebank Weihenstephan team as well as new laboratory assistant together with an experienced office manager. This constellation allows a better availability for the customers needs.

My sister Rita Briem and I act as the directors of the company and work clearly in the background. We will not operate in the daily operational business.

**BBII:** *What role does Prof Donhauser play?*

**Dr Briem:** Prof Donhauser does not play a corporate role anymore. He plays an important role in the advisory board. We will build up

the company with a unique and sustainable concept along with the foundation of a trust. Prof Donhauser plays an important role, as the trust will offer young scientists the opportunity to take part in a promotion that will be financially supported. Astonishingly enough the TU Munich did not show that much interest in this offer when it was appointed.

**BBII:** *What operational benefits do the incorporation of the Hefebank Weihenstephan offer?*

**Dr Briem:** The Hefebank Weihenstephan will be focusing from an operational view 100% upon the yeast strains and the issues that the brew industry could possibly have. Our capable characteristics are that the direct deposit of pure yeast cultivated strains as well as the technological characterisation and parameterisation of the offered pure cultivated yeast strains.

We will not do fundamental research covering genetic or molecular biological differentiation due to the fact that was researched by Prof Donhauser during the early 70's and 80's with the existing pure yeast strains. We would rather be researching the existing yeast strains, characterising and obtaining the necessary research for optimisation.

**BBII:** *For example?*

**Dr Briem:** There are certain subjects that till today have not been considered accordingly

- How should what yeast strain be propagated?
- Are individual yeast strains appropriate even for certain containers or tanks, temperatures and pressures?
- How does this change the resulting aroma spectrums?

**BBII:** *Is the applied research of pure yeast strains possible?*

**Dr Briem:** Yes, it is possible as far one discharges the illusion of other technical parameters which at the same time play an important role that have to be clarified. We will use our main function as a standardised culture medium source. That means a 100% categorisation and to catalogue all the characterisation of the yeast detached from substrate quality.

**BBII:** *How many yeast strains are actually offered?*

**Dr Briem:** Due to the complex diversity of the yeast cultures it is difficult to answer this question. At what stage is the difference between yeast strains defined? As we have some strains in our deposit that are genetically almost identical, nevertheless during the fermentation react differently. We are also depositing yeast that has been sent to us from breweries that we then isolate and keep on hold. The amount of the exact yeast strains amounts to about 100.

**BBII:** *What yeast strains are in high demand at present?*

**Dr Briem:** The yeast strains named W 34/70, W 34/78 and W 68 are within the highest demand with approx. 90% of our sales. A percentage of 40% of the domestic German market share and 60% of the international with a constant increase. These yeast strains can only be marketed and sold under the license of Hefebank Weihenstephan. We have also received a high demand upon the non-alcoholic production and fermentation methods.

**BBII:** *Your aim is to use the name Hefebank Weihenstephan as your sustainable aspect.*

**Dr Briem:** Not only. I see the opportunity of the excellent image and reputation of the Hefebank Weihenstephan with its traditional values for the German and international brewing industries and to be present without the complicated university structures that are constantly being re-structured. The branding of the Hefebank Weihenstephan GmbH stands for quality and I shall be using that branding and shall push the German standards and quality without the support of the university. This will be achieved with an excellent and competitive customer service along with the preservation of the natural pure yeast strains and the present scientific research.

**BBII:** *What is to come next?*

**Dr Briem:** The present renewal of the certification of the ISO 9001:2008. It is necessary as the certification of the Hefebank Weihenstephan at the TU Munich expired in 2002. We will also set up an extensive online shop that will optimise the ordering process.

We will also work on a combination of pure cultivated yeast strain and culture medium so that smaller businesses can start their own propagation easier.

We are also in the process of setting up a glossary for our international customers, together with highly qualified video clips, photo sequences to offer a complete transparency and quality customer service.

**BBII:** *Dr Briem, we would like to thank you for this very interesting interview.* □

## *Dr Fritz Briem*

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Dr Fritz Briem passed studies and ph D at the TU Munich-Weihenstephan, Germany. After his assistance period at the TU Munich-Weihenstephan, he founded Scarabaeus GmbH, Germany (non-alcoholic fermented beverages), and was employed as Director of Education at the Siebel Institute Chicago, USA, and as Director of Doemens, Germany. Currently he is Director of Lupex GmbH, Germany, and Director of technology and product development at Boonrawd Brewery, Thailand.