



Nutana Den Sanitære Fødevarefabrik – the Sanitarium Food Factory located at Baldersgade 14 på Nørrebro in København from 1898-1967.

Photographer Unknown/ADAMS.

Nutana Food Factory (1898-1991)

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Originally owned and operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Nutana was a health food factory in Denmark. The Skandinavisk Filantropisk Selskab (Scandinavian Philanthropic Society) established it in 1898, the same year *Skodsborg Badesanatorium* (Skodsborg Sanitarium) also began. For many years it was known by *Den Sanitære Fødevarerfabrik* but took the name *Nutana* in 1974 after one of its main products, the Nutana vegetable margarine. The factory started small but reached a peak in the 1980s, when it covered a major part of the health food market in Denmark. Because of financial problems, however, the church sold it in 1991 to a private investor, and the ownership has since changed several times.¹

Founding

Carl Ottosen had studied medicine in the United States and worked with John Harvey Kellogg in his Battle Creek Sanatorium where Carl learned different health treatments and the link between health and good diet. He had seen how sick people's health improved faster when they received a meat-free diet of natural foods. Ottosen wanted to introduce those principles in the Scandinavian countries.²

A meeting in Kristiania (Oslo), Norway, called by Carl Ottosen for May 9, 1897, resulted in the founding of the Skandinavisk Filantropisk Selskab.³ The mission statement mentioned that, in addition to operating sanatoriums and nursing schools, the organization would establish "food factories, bakeries and cooking schools."⁴

A few days after that meeting, on May 12, it was decided to request the General Conference to send bakery manager John P. Hansen to Denmark to help set up a health food factory.⁵ On October 5 of the same year the society decided to buy a property at Baldersgade 14, Copenhagen, to begin a bakery and other food production.⁶ The purchase price was 13,000 kr. (US\$ 2,000). Then leaders made a detailed list of the necessary equipment, fixtures, ingredient supplies, packing materials, fuel, etc. required to start the company which raised the cost to a total of 15,000 kr. Much discussion involved whether, in order to save money, the bakery should begin in the proposed Skodsborg Badesanatorium. Eventually, administration made a decision to start the factory in the buildings in Baldersgade 14⁷ and asked Hansen to move to the property and serve as the first manager.

History

In the beginning the food factory went by the name Den Sanitære Fødevarerfabrik (The Sanitary Food Factory). Initially it manufactured different types of bread and coffee and tea substitutes. The business had close links to the sanatorium, and advertisements mentioned that it was the food factory of Skodsborg Badesanatorium. Some members of the Skandinavisk Filantropisk Selskab committee felt that the factory was generating too much profit to the disadvantage of the sanatorium, so a meeting in 1900 voted that "the Food Factory will in the future deliver to Skodsborg Badesanatorium bread, biscuits, granola and cereal at a 50 percent discount."⁸

In the beginning the firm had just three employees. It delivered food items to its nearest customers by a horse-drawn carriage, and the products were only to be sold for cash. The company set up a store for church members in the Ebenezer building in Copenhagen, the site of the Danish conference office. A shop would later follow in Frederikshavn, Northern Jutland, operated by the Skandinavisk Filantropisk Selskab with grocer C.C. Hansen as manager. A privately owned vegetarian restaurant in Løvstræde, Copenhagen, also sold the products.⁹

As time went by the range of products increased. Meat substitutes introduced under the brand names of Nuttolene, Protose, Bean Potage, and others became household names.¹⁰ Johanne Ottosen, the wife of Dr. Carl Ottosen, had a great interest in health foods and supplied some of the recipes for the meat substitutes that went into production. She also authored vegetarian cookbooks, among them *Rationel Ernæring og Madlavning* (Rational Nutrition and Food Preparation).¹¹

In 1915 the company erected a new building on the Baldersgade 14 property, and by then the employees had increased to 10.¹² As Adventist ministers preached the health message in Adventist congregations and institutions around the country, many members began to purchase the products. Skodsborg Badesanatorium also had their own store "Sanafer," where staff and others could buy their groceries and vegetarian food products.

At the end of a summer meeting for the church in 1930 the participants, most of whom had come by bicycle, could not travel home because of heavy rain. Harry Westerlund, who was a successful colporteur at the time, obtained permission to have a look inside the church elder's kitchen to see if he could find some food for the hungry people. Out of pickled beetroot and some onions he made a tasty spread that people put on pieces of rye bread and had their worst hunger satisfied. Word of it reached Dr. Carl Ottosen at Skodsborg Badesanatorium, and a few days later he offered Harry Westerlund the job of leading Den Sanitære Fødevarerfabrik. Westerlund set out to increase the variety of food items and expand the business. Skodsborg cutlets, popularly known as "Westerlund's galoshes," went into production as well as a health bread made of four kinds of grain, breakfast flakes of barley, soybeans in a tomato broth, tea from apple leaves, and more. He also initiated the production of the pure vegetable margarine that would become known as "Nutana margarine." He also made the food factory a center for mission, with weekly prayer meetings and special food distribution for the needy in Copenhagen. During World War II the company also arranged the shipping of tens of tons of basic food items to Adventists in Norway who were not able to get what they needed.¹³

During the first years the income from the food factory had been rather modest. In 1911 it was 27,130 kr. Thirty years later it had increased to 580,758 kr. and continued to grow during succeeding years.¹⁴ With the greater range of products and increased sales, the company decided to leave the old premises in Copenhagen and buy a dairy in Bjæverskov, 55 km away. The new facilities were officially dedicated in November 1967, and a new chapter with a rapid development of the food factory began.¹⁵ W. Svarre Jensen was the managing director at

the time, but in 1971 church leaders asked him to serve as head of the Danish Publishing House as well. The dramatic development in the health food industry, however, meant that he could not effectively maintain his double responsibility. So, the church requested that he stay with publishing and invited Pastor Bent Nielsen, who had shown interest and skills in business, to serve as managing director of the food company beginning in 1973.¹⁶

Rise and Demise

In 1974 administration changed the name of the factory to “Nutana.”¹⁷ Dietary supplements and bagged items, such as nuts, dried fruit, rice, beans, etc. gradually came to count for a major part of the sales, and the range of goods eventually numbered in the hundreds. By the mid-1970s sales had reached about 30 million kr. (US\$ 4.5 million).¹⁸ The factory building expanded, first in 1975 and again in 1980, to cover 13,000 square meters. An additional storehouse of 2,500 square meters was erected in Løsning in Jutland. Frozen foods joined the inventory.

By the mid-1980s employees had grown to 170-180, including a number of sales representatives who regularly visited food distributors and stores across Denmark to make sure that they had Nutana products on their shelves. It was in this period that Nutana reached its peak and represented a major part of the health food market in the country. In addition, the company exported some of its products to neighboring countries, primarily Finland, Sweden, and Norway, but also to Holland, Austria, and Germany. During those years the sales rose to more than 140 million kr. (US\$ 22 million).^{19 20 21}

In its mission statement Nutana had added that “the surplus from this factory should be used for the development of new products and the initiation of new projects.”²² One of the “new projects” was launched in the center of Copenhagen. Beginning about 1975 Nutana ran a vegetarian restaurant at Israel’s Place together with a health food store. It rented additional rooms for health lectures and other health-related initiatives.²³ The restaurant didn’t succeed as well as had been expected. Not opening on Sabbath, not serving alcohol, and not allowing smoking in the facility all limited the clientele that would visit the restaurant at that time. The project had to close in January 1987.²⁴

The economic situation of the food factory started to change toward the end of the 1980s. The major food distributors in Denmark had begun to market their own brands, which affected the sales of Nutana. Transactions related to Nutana Norway, a subsidiary of the parent company in Denmark, resulted in rising debt obligations, which in the end proved too much for Nutana. Suspension of payments followed. The church tried to step in and save the company, but without avail. More than 90 years of health food production and sales came to an abrupt close, and administration sold Nutana on November 30, 1991.²⁵

Legacy

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Denmark had taken an active role in promoting health and providing healthy food alternatives at a time when meat, dairy products, refined bread, and coffee were the main ingredients in the meals of most people and the general understanding of healthful living was extremely limited. Other firms on the health scene have since taken up the challenge and are providing a variety of excellent health food products at affordable prices.

Managing Directors

John P. Hansen (1898-1911); Chr. Hansen (1911-1916); Wilken Nissen (1916-1930); Harry Westerlund (1930-1948); Robert F. Jensen (1948-1966); W. Svarre Jensen (1966-1973); Bent Nielsen (1973-1988); Tue Westing (1988-1990); Nils Rechter (1991).²⁶

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NOTES

1. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, second rev. ed. (1996), s.v. "Nutana."

2. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, second rev. ed. (1996), s.v. "Ottosen, Carl Jacob."
3. Attending the meeting was also O.A. Olsen, L. Johnson, M.M. Olsen, Emil Lind, C. Castberg, R. Petersen, Jacob Hansen, Emil Aahren, John Lorentz, H.L. Henriksen, C.C. Hansen and C.J. Olsen; Harry Westerlund, *Den Sanitære Fødevarefabrik*, 1973 (HASDA Archives), 1.
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5. Harry Westerlund, *Den Sanitære Fødevarefabrik*, 1973 (HASDA (Historical Archive of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Denmark, situated at Vejlebjergskolen, Daugaard, Denmark)), 1.
6. Skandinavisk Filantropisk Selskab Minutes, October 5, 1897, 9.
7. *Ibid.*, October 17, 24, 31, November 4, 1897, and February 3, 1898, 10-16.
8. *Ibid.*, August 26, 1900, 45.
9. Harry Westerlund, *Den Sanitære Fødevarefabrik*, 1973 (HASDA Archives), 2.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Signe Mellempgaard, "Johanne Pauline Ottosen (1864-1921)," Dansk Kvindebiografisk Leksikon (KVINFO, Christianbrygge 3, 1219 Copenhagen K, 2010), Digital version, <https://www.kvinfo.dk/side/597/bio/902/origin/170>.
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20. Email message from Nils Rechter, business manager 1976-1985 and managing director January 1- November 30, 1991, December 16, 2019.

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