



Making pasta involves many steps: from threshing to milling, almost everything at Obermalid takes place on the farm.

—INTERVIEW

Pasta – a family business

Obermalid, St. Oswald, Kastelruth.

The Malfertheiner family grows grain, operates a home mill, and makes pasta from eggs and flour sourced straight from their farm. Max and Brigitte, along with their son Philipp, have built up their small pasta business through a large helping of experimenting and finetuning with a dash of patience.

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From our farms.
For our tables.



Brigitte Malfertheiner with a packet of handmade fusilli: "I make everything with our flour: bread, cakes, spätzle".



Over the decades, grain crops have disappeared from most farms. You've brought them back. Why?

Max: In the past, grain farming was widespread in this area, and also formed a major part of the Obermalid economy. We wanted to revive it so that we could use the grain ourselves.

Brigitte: I make all kinds of things with our flour: bread, cake, and *spätzle* pasta. We probably eat about as much as we sell!

Max: (smiling) Well, not quite that much.

You own twelve dairy cows and 7,000 hens. You offer farm stays. Your pasta workshop in your house's basement is where you hand-make fusilli, campanelle and pizzoccheri. How did you become pasta makers in the first place?

Philipp: I learnt about the production of egg noodles during an internship in Germany. One thing led to another, and we decided to give making grain and pasta a go. That was back in 2017. We currently grow grains on just under one hectare.

Max: We had some spare fields on the farm back then. The cows got plenty of hay from our meadows; the hens didn't need as much space. What's more, our free-range hens often lay eggs that are too large to sell, but which are perfect for making pasta. We now harvest a total of 1,500 kilos of grain per year. It's not a vast quantity, but we use only our own flour for our wholemeal pasta.

What are you growing, and what happens between the field and the plate?

Philipp: We're always trying out something

new. We started with durum wheat, the classic pasta grain. but this didn't work out so well. We now use only spelt and buckwheat for our pasta. The latter is actually not a grain, of course, but we need it for our pizzoccheri. We also grow rye and barley, though only for flour and grain.

—We use only our own flour to make our wholemeal pasta.

Max: It's usually Philipp and me working in the field. All the steps, besides threshing the spelt – for which we travel to the Vinschgau Valley – take place here on the farm: we thresh, dry and mill our own grain. The mill runs in the evening, and the next morning Brigitte or Philipp use the freshly-ground flour to make pasta.

Philipp: Drying was the hardest part in the beginning.

Brigitte: Yes, that's the critical point at which a lot could go wrong. If it's dried too quickly, the pasta will fall apart when cooked. If it's dried too slowly, mould starts growing. Philipp has computerised the drying system. The humidity regulates itself automatically.

Where do you sell your pasta and other products?

Brigitte: We mainly sell the pasta, flour and grain at the local supermarket in Kastelruth and at a farm shop in Meran. On top of that, there are the Christmas hampers, which can easily involve sending out a few hundred packets of pasta at a time.

Max: Every now and then, a catering business buys a few kilos of pasta or flour, but there's no regular collaboration.

Your wholemeal pasta isn't like the typical pasta you'd find in the supermarket. It's darker in colour, more intense in flavour and more expensive. Is that why the hospitality industry is hesitating?

Brigitte: With us, the germ remains in the wholemeal flour. This makes the pasta more nutritious and filling, but naturally also more complex in flavour – quite different from what the palate is used to from mass-produced products.

Max: The fact that it's healthier – partly because we don't use pesticides in the fields – is of no interest to the catering industry at the moment. The cost plays a more important role. We know that we're more expensive, but we don't buy a single gram of grain; we only



produce as much pasta as our fields can yield.
Brigitte: What really bothers us is that fact that some places feature our products on their menus all year round – “Strudel made with flour from Obermalid” – but only buy a kilo at a time. In that case, I’d say if you don’t mean it, you’d be better off not putting it on the menu in the first place.

If demand were greater and more certain, could you envisage expanding production?

Max: There’s certainly potential there. We’d have the option of growing more grain. But everything we do, we do above all out of idealism; we don’t have to make a living from pasta production. If demand for our pasta were to increase, it would of course be easier to buy additional grain and thus boost production. However, that does not reflect our principles. We’re holding firm on that point.

Philipp: If we were to grow five times as much in future – because there were reliable buyers – we could also sell at a lower price.

Brigitte: That’s the real key. When a hospitality business says: I’ll lose a certain quantity over the course of the year, then we can make plans. It allows something to be built, but this requires patience on both sides. Grain doesn’t just grow on command.

Three things you can learn from Obermalid

Local highlight. You don’t have to completely overhaul your diet to show your appreciation for local produce. A dish featuring locally made pasta as the highlight of the menu is enough – and is in fact worth more to many guests.

Kitchen essentials. Chefs often have more influence than required – anyone who can persuade them to try local produce and cook with it has already taken the most important step.

Enthusiasm is contagious. Niches can thrive if generations are happy to carry them forward – not out of a sense of duty, but rather out of conviction. This applies just as much to producers as it does to anyone who wants to work with them.



Behind each of these portraits is the **alma** network. The food that ends up on plates in the Seiser Alm region of the Dolomites doesn't happen by chance - it's the result of a close collaboration between farmers and restaurateurs. They discuss quantities, adjust logistics, and decide together what can be grown and how it makes its way from the farm to the table. This creates a local economic cycle in which supply and demand come together - underpinned by trust and reliability.

alma is neither a label nor a campaign, but a network that makes this collaboration visible: specific and closely tied to the daily lives of the people who work and do business here.

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