

CUSTOMER PROFILE

Zdeněk Sýkora has been in the veterinary business in the Czech Republic since 1978. He's seen governments collapse, markets open and pet care expand.



Zdeněk Sýkora

An eye on the past, present and future



Zdeněk (center) surrounded by the Mevet team.

As the current president of Mevet, exclusive distributor of Merial products in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and a former employee of Rhône-Mérieux, Zdeněk Sýkora can attest to the changes in the animal health market in the central Europe over the past 30 years.

Mevet, Merial distributor:

- **Head office:**
Prague, Czech Republic
- **Branch office:**
Nitra, Slovakia
- **19 employees,**
including 12 veterinarians
- **Sales by sector:**
46% Pharmaceuticals
52.4% Biologicals
1.6% Other

"First, I worked as a vet for production animals in the countryside just east of Prague, then I worked in the animal nutrition department for the state feed industry," says Zdeněk. "Following the great changes of 1989, the market opened up, and that's when Rhône-Mérieux, now Merial, arrived."

CHANGING TASTES

"Under the old regime, we had imported some animal feed additives from outside companies, like Rhône-Poulenc, but in animal health products, we had nothing," Zdeněk remembered. "We had been completely self-sufficient as a State. When communism fell, there was no one from abroad present on the market."

The opening of the borders affected the different areas of animal health of what was then Czechoslovakia (which later split into the separate Czech and Slovak Republics). "In 1989 and after, the government had a 'restitution' program," Zdeněk explained. "They gave back the cattle to the families from whom they had taken them forty years earlier. The problem was that members of these families no longer lived on farms. They usually sent the animals to be slaughtered and took the money. Many state farms and cooperatives were affected." Cattle and swine farming declined dramatically. Demand for the once typical dishes of beef and pork also diminished, as people grew more health-conscious and demand for chicken, along with dairy products, increased. "According to today's Minister of Agriculture, the future for Czech Republic farming is in poultry and dairy," Zdeněk said.

LIFE COMPANIONS

But where areas of Production Animals have suffered, the market in Companion Animals has exploded. According to Zdeněk, the 1990s saw a migration from the panalacks (the former communist apartment blocks) to reclaimed family homes, complete with gardens, and a related increase in dog ownership. "People are also treating their pets differently than before," Zdeněk said. "They are investing more in their pets - emotionally and, with the increased wealth, financially."

Cats have particularly benefited in more recent years, with sales in cat products increasing by 20% to 25% in the past half-decade. Before, they were vaccinated only once a year against rabies due to government regulations, but now they typically receive yearly multivaccinations against numerous diseases.

"The number of pet shows and competition events is perhaps the greatest example of this trend," Zdeněk pointed out. "Before, they were few and far between. Now, there's one every second week."

GROWING DEMANDS

When Mevet, based in Prague, was founded in 2003, Zdeněk became its president. "When we started then, we were eleven people with long histories of working in animal health. Now, we have nineteen, all dedicated to different segments of a growing market."

DID YOU KNOW ?

• Relative to population, the Czech Republic has more dogs as pets than any other country in the world.

(source: www.expats.cz)

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