SALTFOCUS

A MAGAZINE ABOUT SALT FROM SALT SPECIALTIES | NO1 2026

NEW Magazine!



When salt controls everything – from sea to can at Röda Ulven Surströmming

A conversation with a Salt Master

"Why salt is never just salt"

Why deep salt expertise is becoming a strategic asset for Europe's food industry

At Kikkoman it's all about quality

From fermentation to flavour



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We drive growth by collaborating with customers and colleagues to become more focused, faster, efficient, and better every day.

SALT SPECIALTIES

THE ONE COMPLETE NORDIC SALT PRODUCER

Our brands:

Suprasel®

Sanal®

JOZO Since 1929

KNZ®

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Our sites for extraction and production of vacuum salt in Europe:

Marieholm Salt Specialties AB
Marieholmsgatan 70
415 02 Gothenburg, Sweden

Mariager Salt Specialties A/S
Hadsundvej 17
9550 Mariager, Denmark

Hengelo Salt Specialties N
Boortorenweg 101, 7554 RS
Hengelo, Netherlands

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It's all about salt

Welcome to Salt Focus, the publication of Salt Specialties, part of Groupe Salins.

Salt may seem simple, but it is essential to everyday life and far more complex than it appears. Its quality, purity, origin, and formulation define its value and its purpose.

Through this magazine, we share the world behind our products – our production sites, our expertise, our customers, and the people who make it possible. From food and retail to pharmaceuticals, agriculture, water treatment, and industry, every crystal matters and every application demand precision.

With more than 100 years of experience, Salt Specialties combines trusted know-how with continuous innovation. Through brands such as Suprasel®, Jozo®, Nezo®, KNZ®, Sanal®, and Broxo®, we work every day to deliver quality, reliability, and long-term value.

Salt Focus reflects this commitment. It is a way to stay close to our customers and partners, and to share the values that guide us: quality, responsibility, and respect for people and places.

Because for us, salt is never just salt.

We hope you will enjoy Salt Focus Magazine.

Hubert François
President



A salt treasure on JUTLAND

HOW LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP TURNED A NATURAL RESOURCE INTO A STRATEGIC ASSET

On the east coast of Jutland, in the small Danish town of Mariager, lies one of Northern Europe's most remarkable – and still surprisingly unknown – industrial treasures. Beneath the landscape rests a massive salt deposit, formed more than 200 million years ago, that today supplies high-quality salt to food producers across Europe and beyond. This is not just a story about geology. It is a story about long-term thinking, responsible resource management, and how nature and technology can work hand in hand.

A discovery beneath the surface

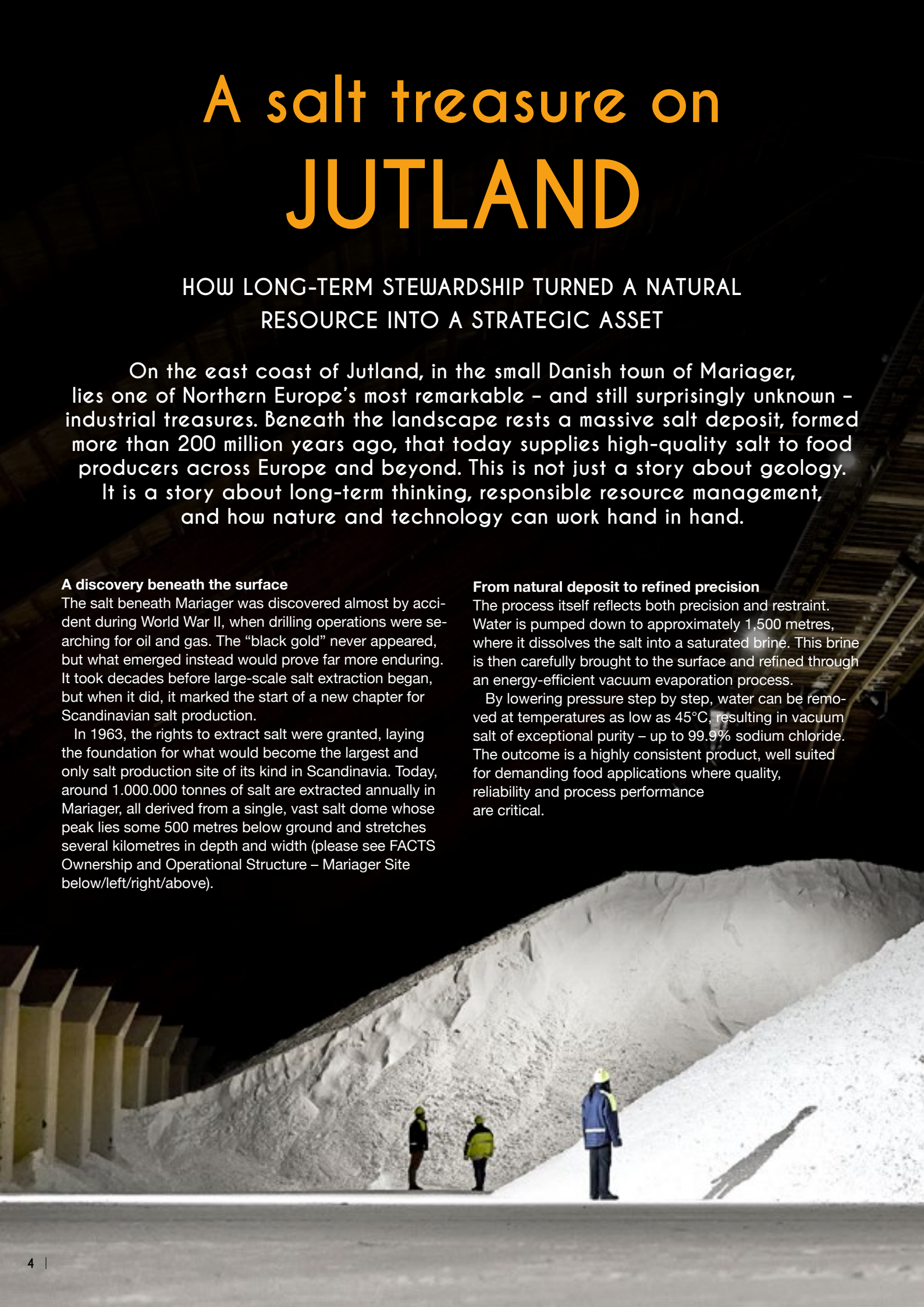
The salt beneath Mariager was discovered almost by accident during World War II, when drilling operations were searching for oil and gas. The "black gold" never appeared, but what emerged instead would prove far more enduring. It took decades before large-scale salt extraction began, but when it did, it marked the start of a new chapter for Scandinavian salt production.

In 1963, the rights to extract salt were granted, laying the foundation for what would become the largest and only salt production site of its kind in Scandinavia. Today, around 1.000.000 tonnes of salt are extracted annually in Mariager, all derived from a single, vast salt dome whose peak lies some 500 metres below ground and stretches several kilometres in depth and width (please see FACTS Ownership and Operational Structure – Mariager Site below/left/right/above).

From natural deposit to refined precision

The process itself reflects both precision and restraint. Water is pumped down to approximately 1,500 metres, where it dissolves the salt into a saturated brine. This brine is then carefully brought to the surface and refined through an energy-efficient vacuum evaporation process.

By lowering pressure step by step, water can be removed at temperatures as low as 45°C, resulting in vacuum salt of exceptional purity – up to 99.9% sodium chloride. The outcome is a highly consistent product, well suited for demanding food applications where quality, reliability and process performance are critical.



Purity beyond food – Sanal® pharmaceutical-grade salt
This exceptional purity is not only a benchmark for demanding food applications. The natural salt from the Mariager deposit is so clean and consistent that it also meets the stringent requirements of pharmaceutical manufacturing. Only a handful of salt sources in Europe reach this level, and it is a distinction that speaks volumes about both the geological origin and the controlled production process. For Mariager, this dual suitability is a point of well-earned pride – proof that the deposit delivers quality at the very highest end of industrial standards.

A clear example is Sanal®, a pharmaceutical-grade salt produced from the same brine. Sanal is used as an excipient in medicines and medical applications, where purity, traceability and batch-to-batch consistency are non-negotiable. That salt from the Mariager deposit can serve both advanced food production and the pharmaceutical industry underlines the robustness of the process and the long-term value of the resource. It is a quiet but powerful validation of precision, discipline and stewardship – from deep geological formation to highly regulated end use.

Stewardship today – security for tomorrow
What makes this approach particularly relevant today is not only the quality of the salt, but the philosophy behind its production. Salt is not a renewable resource. That fact alone places a responsibility on those who extract it. Longterm licences, continuous investment, and strict process control are essential to ensure that this natural asset is used wisely – today and for generations to come.

At Mariager, this responsibility is shared by the around 180 employees, including engineers, technicians, operators and laboratory specialists. Their combined expertise ensures not only consistent product quality, but also continuous improvements in efficiency, safety and environmental performance. This is how a geological legacy is translated into a modern industrial operation.

As food systems evolve and expectations on transparency, sustainability and security of supply increase, sites like Mariager play an increasingly strategic role. They show how responsible salt production is not just about extraction, but about stewardship. Stewardship of resources, processes and knowledge.

With significant investments continuously being made in new facilities and upgraded capacity in Mariager, the next chapter is already taking shape. What began as a hidden salt treasure beneath Jutland is evolving into a future-ready production platform, designed to support the food industry with reliable, high-quality salt for decades to come.

In the following article, we take a closer look at the inauguration of the new Mariager facility and what it means for the future of sustainable salt production.

FACTS: OWNERSHIP AND OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE – MARIAGER SITE

Subsurface resource (below ground)
The salt deposit and extraction rights are owned by **Nobian.** The vacuum evaporation is managed by Dansk Salt.

Surface operations (above ground)
The refining, packing, warehousing and dispatch is owned and operated by Mariager Salt Specialties, a company within **Groupe Salins.**

Operational interface
Nobian owns and manages the geological asset and upstream extraction. **Mariager Salt Specialties** manages downstream processing, value addition and market supply.

The two companies operate under separate ownership structures, with clearly defined roles in the value chain, while co-located at the Mariager site to ensure industrial efficiency and supply continuity.



A strategic investment rooted in sustainability

MARIAGER SALT SPECIALTIES INAUGURATES NEW WAREHOUSE AND DISPATCH FACILITY IN DENMARK

On 4 February 2026, Mariager Salt Specialties officially inaugurated its new warehouse and dispatch facility at the Mariager site in Denmark. The event marked an important milestone, not only for the company's operational footprint in the Nordics, but also for its long-term commitment to sustainable, efficient and locally anchored production and logistics.

"We are very proud to open this new warehouse, delivered on time and within budget thanks to strong collaboration with many partners and stakeholders. The project confirms that our site in Mariager is among the world's leading locations for high-quality salt handling, and we see clear potential for further investments here in the future", says Hubert François, President, Groupe Salins – owner of Mariager Salt Specialties.

Municipal Support for Sustainable Industrial Development

The inauguration was also attended by representatives from the municipality and local stakeholders. Among the guests was Jesper Skov Mikkelsen, Mayor of Mariagerfjord Kommune, who highlighted the value of long-term industrial investments for local employment, development and resilience:

"It is always something special when a large, international company chooses to invest in and expand its activities in our area. This day is therefore not only important for the company itself – it is also an important day for Mariagerfjord Municipality," said Jesper Skov Mikkelsen, Mayor of Mariagerfjord Municipality to local news channel Mariagerfjord Posten.dk on February 6th.

One site – fewer transports

The new facility represents an investment of more than DKK 26 million and is the result of approximately eighteen months of construction. With capacity for up to 7,200 pallets, the warehouse allows Mariager Salt Specialties to consolidate storage that was previously spread across multiple external locations.

This consolidation is a key driver behind the project's sustainability impact.

By bringing storage and dispatch together at the Mariager site, the company significantly reduces the need for external warehousing and long-distance transport between facilities. Fewer truck movements mean lower fuel consumption, reduced CO_2 emissions and improved logistics predictability, benefits that extend across the entire value chain – from production planning to customer delivery.

The new setup also supports smoother material flows and shorter internal lead times, strengthening supply chain reliability while reducing the overall environmental footprint.

Built for efficiency and future needs

Designed as a modern, high-performance logistics hub, the warehouse is tailored to support a broad portfolio of salt products and packaging formats. Centralised storage improves stock control, reduces handling steps and enables more efficient order picking and dispatch.

From an operational perspective, the investment creates a stronger and more coherent framework for production, packing and logistics, thus supporting both current volumes and future growth. From a sustainability perspective, it is a



"The project confirms that our site in Mariager is among the world's leading locations for high-quality salt handling"

Hubert François, President, Groupe Salins

concrete example of how efficiency gains and climate considerations can go hand in hand.

Local investment, global perspective

At the inauguration, representatives from Groupe Salins and Nobian joined local management to underline the strategic importance of the Mariager site within the group's Nordic and European operations.

The local municipality emphasised that investments of this kind reach far beyond buildings and logistics. They contribute to local jobs, skills development and long-term confidence in the region as an attractive place to live, work and invest.

A step forward, towards a sustainable salt future

With the new warehouse and dispatch facility now fully operational, Mariager Salt Specialties has taken a significant step towards more sustainable logistics, reduced CO_2 emissions and a more resilient supply chain.

It is a clear demonstration that industrial competitiveness and environmental responsibility are not opposing goals, but mutually reinforcing ones when long-term thinking, local commitment and smart design come together.



A CONVERSATION WITH A SALT MASTER:

When salt controls everything – from sea to can at Röda Ulven Surströmming

In Skagshamn, on Sweden's High Coast, one of the country's most distinctive food production methods takes place every year. Here, freshly caught Baltic herring is transformed into surströmming – through time, temperature, and one decisive factor: salt. For Röda Ulven, salt is not just an ingredient. It is the engine of the entire method.

Photos by: Gösta Hannells Fisksalteri



"Salt is not just an ingredient.
It's a tool for controlling the entire fermentation."

Johan Berlin, Salt Master

"Salt is what controls everything. Without salt, there is no product. Too little salt – and it rots. Too much – and it becomes nothing more than salted herring", says Johan Berlin, Site Manager and Salt Master at Röda Ulven Surströmming.

A Living Craft That Keeps Evolving

In theory, surströmming is simple. Three ingredients: fish, water, and salt. In practice, it is one of the most complex processes in the food industry.

"It's a living process, all the way until the fish is canned – and sometimes even after that. That's what makes it challenging, and what makes it so interesting", says Johan Berlin.

Production begins with fresh Baltic herring. The fish is cleaned, with head and entrails removed, and placed in a strong brine for blood leaching. Already at this stage, salt plays a crucial role.

On day two, the fish is transferred to barrels with a lower salt concentration. This is when fermentation begins. The barrels are stored in temperature-controlled environments, where the process continues for several weeks.

"It's the interplay between fish, salt, time, and temperature that determines the outcome. And we constantly have to adapt to the raw material – for example, the fat content of the fish, which varies depending on the season".

The Salt Master and the Saltery Specialists – Teamwork Behind the Craft

At Röda Ulven, it is not only the method that matters – it is the people who control it. Johan Berlin, Site Manager and Salt Master, has overall responsibility. But the work is carried out in close collaboration with the saltery specialists – skilled craftsmen who handle fermentation, preparation, and quality assessment on a daily basis.

"The honorary title "Salt Master" may sound a bit grand, but in practice it means being the foreman of a saltery. At the same time, it's in the collaboration between the Salt Master and the saltery specialists that Röda Ulven's surströmming takes shape – from fresh raw material to finished product. It's teamwork", says Johan.

Listening to the Fermentation: "From Pops to a Roaring Sound"

There are no exact recipes for producing perfect surströmming. Instead, it relies on experience and sensory evaluation.

"We use all our senses to monitor the fermentation. We listen to the barrels, we smell, we feel, and we taste."

And "listening" is quite literal. By placing an ear against the barrels, an experienced producer can hear how fermentation is progressing.

"At first, you only hear small popping sounds. When it's fully fermented, it almost sounds like a rushing waterfall if you put your ear against the barrel."



This ability to "listen in" is essential. Every time a barrel is opened, the fermentation is affected, which means control must be carried out with precision.

"We take samples. You don't want to disturb the fermentation unnecessarily, but at the same time you need to know what's happening."

Salt as a Control Instrument

The difference between a stable production and a failed one often lies in the details – and in the salt.

"Salt is not just an ingredient. It's a tool for controlling the entire fermentation."

By adjusting salt levels and temperature, fermentation can be slowed down or accelerated depending on the characteristics of the raw material.

"If the fish is leaner, fermentation can go too fast. Then we need a stronger brine to slow it down. If it's fattier, it may take longer."

Even in the final stage, during canning, salt plays an active role.

"At that point, we can choose to let the fish continue fermenting in the can, or to slow it down by adjusting the salt concentration in the brine."

Precision, Teamwork, and Craftsmanship in Every Step

Although the product is rooted in tradition, production is far from random.

Each barrel is individually assessed before being selected for canning. During the summer, 20–25 people work with canning, but the decision of when a batch is ready lies with the Salt Master and the saltery experts.

"Every barrel is tasted. It's our responsibility to decide when it's ready."

The result is a product with a long shelf life – but only if handled correctly.

NOTE: The title "Salt Master" is not unique to surströmming production. It also appears in other areas of food production where salt curing is used, such as meat, fish, and charcuterie.

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"You can't produce our product without salt. But it's not just about adding it – it's about using it correctly, and using the right salt."



From left to right: André Hägglund and Linus Berlin, Saltery Specialists and Johan Berlin, Salt Master.

"Many people think it's a canned product that can be stored at room temperature. It's not. It's a chilled product. If surströmming is stored at room temperature, fermentation continues, and eventually it just turns into mush."

The Right Salt – A Prerequisite, Not a Detail

For Röda Ulven, the choice of salt is not something to experiment with.

"We use a fine salt that dissolves properly. That's a prerequisite for getting the right brine."

Changing salt is not done lightly.

"I know they tried switching supplier before my time. It didn't work as well. I don't know exactly what the difference was, but the result wasn't what we wanted. So they switched back."

Since then, the same type of salt – and the same supplier – has been used.

"We've had a long-standing collaboration and it works very well. We've never had any problems, so there's no reason to change."

Stability Without Compromising Craftsmanship

For Röda Ulven, the collaboration with Salt Specialties is not about constant development, but about reliability and consistency.

"We already know our production method. There's no product development going on here. We get salt with the documentation we need. We know what we're getting. That's important."

For a method built on small variations, stability is crucial.

"When you work with something that's alive, certain things must be completely controlled. Salt is one of them. It's a stabilizing factor."

Surströmming – From Local Tradition to International Product

Röda Ulven is still a small company, but with growing exports.

"Germany is our largest market in Europe, but we also sell to France, Denmark, and other countries."

Export places additional demands on production and raw materials, including regulations regarding the origin of the fish.

"That affects how and when we source the raw material, but the production itself remains the same."

More Than Just an Ingredient

At a time when salt is often discussed from a health perspective, its technical function is easily overlooked. For Röda Ulven, the picture is clear: salt is a critical technical factor in production.

"You can't produce our product without salt. But it's not just about adding it – it's about using it correctly, and using the right salt."

Salt influences not only taste, but also food safety, shelf life, and overall quality.

"It's salt, together with time and temperature, that makes the product possible in the first place", says Johan Berlin, Site Manager and Salt Master, Röda Ulven Surströmming.

The Origin of Surströmming

Surströmming dates back to the 16th century and emerged due to a shortage of salt. During King Gustav Vasa's wars with the Hanseatic League, salt became scarce, and fish could not be properly preserved. The unintended fermentation that followed laid the foundation for a unique Swedish food tradition that remains largely unchanged today, more than half a millennium later.

About Röda Ulven

Röda Ulven is one of Sweden's most well-known surströmming brands, rooted in the fishing traditions of the High Coast. The business was established in the 1940s under the name AB Gösta Hannells Fisksalteri and has grown from a local saltery into an established producer with exports to several European markets.

Production still takes place in Skagshamn, outside Örnsköldsvik, where craftsmanship, experience, and careful control define the work. Today, the business continues to be driven by generations of knowledge – where the combination of tradition and modern control is key to the final result.

HOW SURSTRÖMMING IS PRODUCED



1. Baltic herring is caught (traditionally April–May, today also at other times for export)
2. Cleaning (head and entrails removed)
3. Day 1: Blood leaching in strong brine
4. Day 2: Transfer to barrels with lower salt concentration
5. Fermentation in temperature-controlled rooms (typically 4–5 weeks)
6. Continuous monitoring through smell, taste, touch, and sound
7. Selection and assessment of finished barrels
8. Canning (salt added in new or existing brine)
9. Chilled storage to control further fermentation
10. PREMIERE: Third Thursday of August

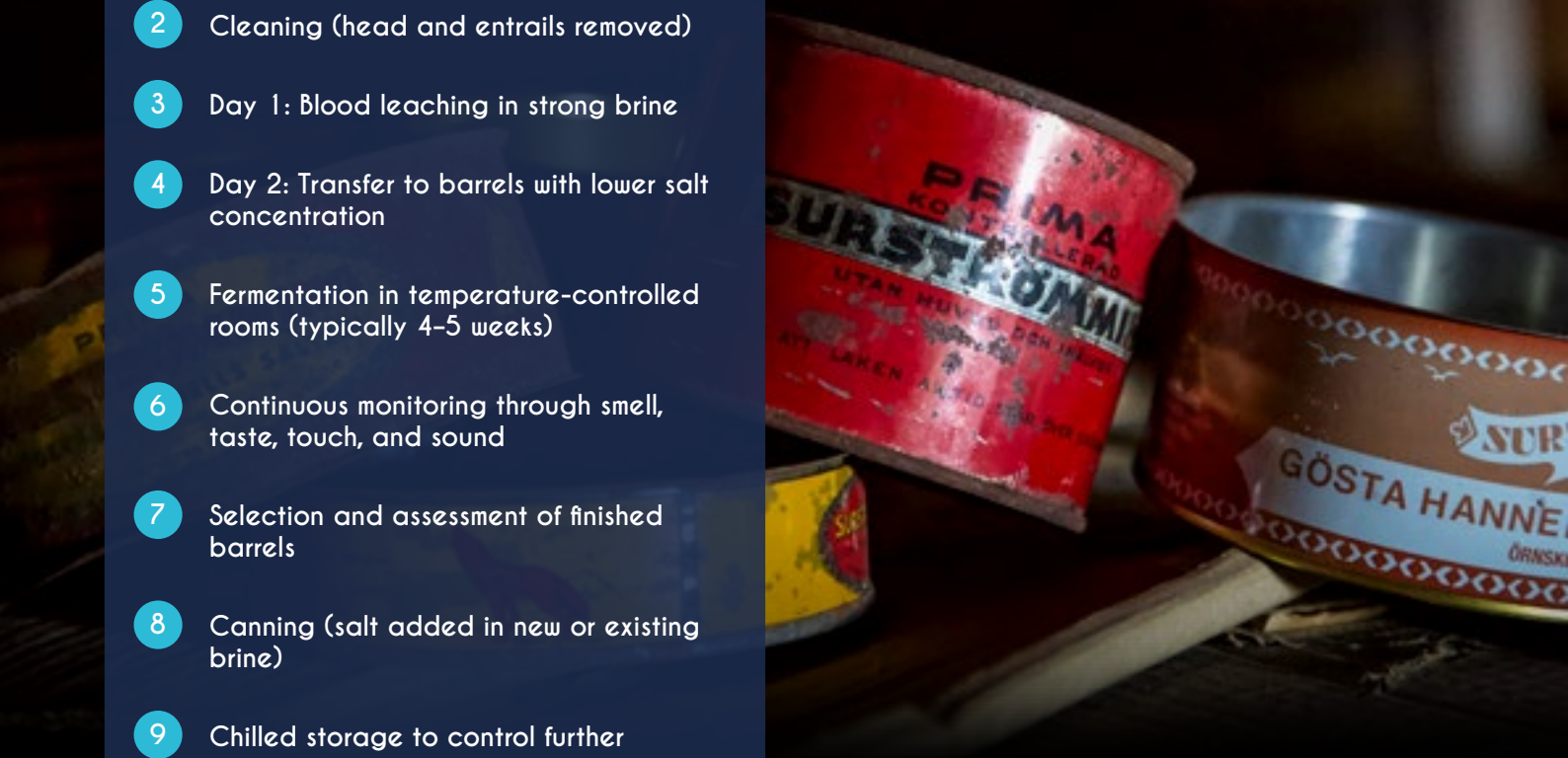
About the Surströmming Academy

The Surströmming Academy works to preserve and promote the Swedish surströmming tradition and awards honorary titles such as Salt Master.

The Academy's highest distinction, the "Gold Pin," is awarded to individuals who have made significant contributions to the development and reputation of surströmming.

Recipients include Thomas Hägglund (Gold Pin No. 3), former Production Manager at AB Gösta Hannells Fisksalteri in Skagshamn, and Ruben Madsen (Gold Pin No. 6), a saltery expert and prominent cultural figure from Ulvön.

READ MORE!



Ramon Diaz and Aude Yvon, Salins Group:

“Why salt is never just salt”

WHY DEEP SALT EXPERTISE IS BECOMING A STRATEGIC ASSET FOR EUROPE’S FOOD INDUSTRY

At first glance, salt appears to be one of the simplest ingredients in food manufacturing. It is widely available, relatively inexpensive, and often treated as a commodity. Yet, for food producers navigating increasingly complex regulation, rising sustainability demands, and more health-conscious consumers, salt has quietly become a strategic variable rather than a background ingredient.



For European food manufacturers – from bakeries and cheese producers to delicatessen, fermented foods and traditional products – the critical question today is not only which salt to use, but *how that salt supports compliance, process stability, and long-term trust.*

"We don't provide salt only – we provide knowledge," says Ramon Diaz, Market Development and Technical Support at Salins Group / Salt Specialties.

"Our role is to help customers use salt more effectively – technically, regulatory-wise, and in their specific applications," says Aude Yvon, Technical Development Support at Salins Group.

> "We don't provide salt only – we provide knowledge"
>
> Ramon Diaz, Market Development and Technical Support at Hengelo Salt Specialties, Groupe Salins

Salt compliance as a licence to operate

For food producers, salt compliance is not only about product quality. It is directly linked to their licence to operate. As a salt producer, compliance with EU legislation is a prerequisite to produce at all, and that responsibility extends downstream to every customer application and every market where the finished product is sold.

Salt suppliers therefore play a critical role as both *technical partners and regulatory safeguards*, ensuring that customers can run approved processes and place compliant products on the market.

"What we deliver is a whole package," Ramon Diaz explains. "Not just salt, but documentation, guarantees, and regulatory security that our customers depend on."

Understanding salt as a function – not just an ingredient

Salt influences far more than taste. Its purity, mineral composition, granulation, and production method directly affect shelf life, food safety, fermentation, texture, and processing efficiency.

"Salt seems simple at first," says Aude Yvon, Regulatory and Technical specialist, "but when you look deeper, it becomes complex. Sea salt, rock salt, vacuum salt – each behaves differently. Particle size, naturality, additives: all of this matters, and it has a real impact on the finished product."

When quality issues or regulatory challenges arise in food production, being an essential ingredient, salt is often part of the control checks. Treating salt as a *functional tool* rather than a commodity allows producers to optimise dosing, reduce waste, stabilise processes, and ultimately improve profitability without compromising safety or quality.

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ABOUT RAMON DIAZ



Market Development & Technical Support Manager
14 years at Groupe Salins

With a doctorate in Engineering and a background spanning production, R&D and market development, Ramon Diaz specialises in turning complex technical realities into clear commercial value. In his role, he supports sales and marketing teams with expert technical insight, helping customers make informed decisions that improve both product performance and regulatory compliance.

"Customers don't just buy salt – they buy knowledge, data and confidence."

Regulatory complexity: nitrates, nitrites and organic salt

EU legislation on nitrates, nitrites and organic foods is evolving rapidly – particularly for delicatessen and processed meat products. Targets and limits are not always harmonised across countries, making compliance increasingly complex for food producers operating in multiple markets.

"If customers cannot meet new limits, they cannot sell their products," Aude notes. "That is why our support is essential when legislation changes."

Organic salt is another clear example of regulatory complexity. While salt can now be organically certified in Europe, there is no harmonised EU-level framework. France is currently the only country with clearly defined rules, allowing certified organic sea salt to be offered to food producers.

Defining organic salt is uniquely challenging. Unlike agricultural products, salt is a mineral, produced through fundamentally different methods, such as sea salt harvesting, rock salt mining or vacuum extraction. This has made harmonisation difficult and the topic subject to differing interpretations across Europe.

> "If customers cannot meet new limits, they cannot sell their products"
>
> Aude Yvon, Technical Development Support Manager at Groupe Salins

Iodine: an underestimated health and compliance issue

One of the underestimated strategic issues in the salt market today is iodine. Iodine deficiency remains a public health concern in parts of Europe, yet iodine legislation is not harmonised between countries.

"Iodine is required only in trace amounts," Aude explains, "but it is essential for health. At the same time, intake must not be excessive, which is why it is strictly regulated, a regulation that differs from country to country."

Adding complexity, consumer trends have shifted towards so-called "natural" salts such as Himalayan or Celtic salt, which are typically non-iodised.

"These salts are often perceived as healthier," Ramon says, "but they contain no iodine at all. Awareness is critical here, both for customers and for end consumers."

For food producers, understanding whether salt is iodised, how iodine behaves in processing, and how national legislation applies is a key part of responsible product development.

ABOUT AUDE YVON



Technical Development Support Manager
17 years at Groupe Salins

Aude Yvon is a food engineer with long-standing experience in technical development and regulatory support across food, feed and pharmaceutical applications. Her role sits at the intersection of legislation, process understanding and customer guidance – an area that has become increasingly complex within the EU.

"When regulation becomes complex, our role is to make it understandable – and workable."

Read more about our Eco Vadis commitment on page 19!

Packaging, sustainability and unavoidable trade-offs
Sustainability requirements increasingly extend beyond ingredients to packaging. Upcoming EU packaging legislation, including PPWR, introduces new constraints on packaging weight, recyclability and material use.

The challenge is not a lack of ambition, but competing objectives: lighter packaging, recycled materials, and absolute food safety. For food-grade salt, these requirements can conflict – and compromise is never allowed where health is concerned.

"We must guarantee that salt arrives and remains pristine throughout its shelf life," Ramon explains. "Using recycled materials in food packaging is not straightforward, because safety and material integrity must be fully guaranteed."

Across production sites in France, Netherlands, Denmark, continuous work is underway to reduce packaging material and weight while maintaining full compliance with food safety legislation. The upcoming harmonisation of EU-wide sorting and recycling symbols is a welcome step, simplifying compliance for producers and consumers alike.

Data as an ingredient
Looking ahead, competitiveness in the food industry will increasingly depend on more than physical ingredients.

"Data should be seen as an ingredient," Ramon says. "Carbon footprint, traceability, compliance documentation – customers are buying more than salt. They are buying security."

Reliable data enables smoother audits, stronger sustainability reporting and reduced regulatory risk. It also reassures customers that everything from sourcing to the consumer's table meets quality and health standards.

Thought leadership through collaboration
A key pillar of this work is active engagement in industry dialogue through the *EU Salt Association.* Through this platform, salt producers monitor regulatory developments, contribute expertise, and support evidence-based policymaking at EU level.

Participation ensures early awareness of legislative change and creates a bridge between industry, regulators and society.

"We are the link between technical reality and compliance," Ramon concludes. "Our job is to make salt safe, reliable and worry-free."

As both Ramon and Aude emphasise, this responsibility is carried by large, highly professional quality and technical teams across the organisation – working behind the scenes to ensure one simple outcome: **"Safe salt on every table – without concerns."**

About the EU Salt Association (EUsalt)

EUsalt is the European Salt Producers' Association, that represents crystallised salt producers in Europe and globally.

ROLE
- Represents salt producers in dialogue with EU institutions and international stakeholders
- Promotes understanding of salt's role in food and industrial applications
- Serves as a platform for exchange between industry, policymakers and experts

RELATIONSHIP TO THE EU
- EUsalt is not an EU institution and is not EU-funded
- It is registered in Brussels as an industry and interest organisation
- Engagement with EU institutions takes place through advocacy and policy dialogue

READ MORE!



It's all about quality

FROM FERMENTATION TO FLAVOUR: THE ROLE OF SALT IN QUALITY

Quality. At Kikkoman, that's what it's all about. Everything has to be just right – the taste, the aroma, the entire experience. And it all starts with the basics: the ingredients. Salt is one of them. Without salt, there would be no naturally brewed soy sauce or delicious teriyaki marinade.

Photos by: Kikkoman


KIKKOMAN
NATUURLIJK GEBROUWEN
Sojasaus
Sauce Soja
FERMENTATION NATURELLE
VEGAN
150 ml e

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Kikkoman is a global market leader in the production and distribution of soy sauce. Originally from Japan, the company has a centuries-long history and can be found worldwide in supermarkets, delicatessens, restaurants and Asian grocery stores. Today, the product range includes not only a wide selection of soy sauces, but also teriyaki sauces and marinades, as well as kimchi and poke sauces.

Since 1997, Kikkoman has had a European production facility in Hoogezand-Sappemeer (the Netherlands), where all Kikkoman sauces for the European market are produced. Jan Stutvoet, Senior Manager General Affairs, has worked here since the facility was established and has witnessed all developments firsthand.

From production to procurement

"For many years I worked as Manager Operations in production, where I was also involved in procurement, warehousing and transport. A few years ago, I stepped away from production and now focus on strategic procurement and working with various stakeholders, such as environmental authorities", Jan reflects on his career at Kikkoman.

"What I enjoy most about this job is exploring where we can do things differently. Where can we improve, implement new technology or reduce costs? Those are the kinds of challenges I find interesting."

Influencing factors

And there are plenty of challenges. Themes such as energy prices, sustainability and recycling have an impact on Kikkoman's processes. "A lot is happening in our industry, and many factors influence our production", Jan explains. "Take energy prices, for example, which increased sharply a few years ago. The price of our glass bottles rose significantly as a result. That made our PET bottles increasingly attractive — and they still are."

Consumer trends also play a role. Jan: "Thicker sauces, such as teriyaki sauces, are very popular. Kimchi and poke are also gaining popularity. As a result, our product range continues to expand."

The rich taste of umami

Responding to the growing demand for lower salt intake due to health considerations, Kikkoman now also offers a soy sauce with reduced salt. "This trend is an important theme for our company, also from another perspective", Jan adds. "Research has shown that the rich umami flavour of our soy sauce — the fifth basic taste — is an effective and natural way to reduce salt in dishes. I've tried this myself at home with various recipes, and it really works."

Still, salt remains an essential ingredient in production and therefore in procurement. Jan explains: "Soy sauce is made from four components: soybeans, wheat, salt and water. The quality and origin of these basic ingredients must meet exacting standards. Combined with an extensive production and fermentation process, this ensures the characteristic aroma, colour and

"Suprasel supplies 100% purified, high-quality salt. This purity is particularly important during the refinement process."

Jan Stutvoet, Senior Manager General Affairs at Kikkoman



that distinctive umami flavour in our products." Quality is therefore a top priority at Kikkoman. "It's deeply embedded in our company culture. We leave nothing to chance and never compromise on quality. And we expect the same from our suppliers."

Pure salt of the highest quality

Salt is used at two stages in the soy sauce production process: during fermentation and later during final quality adjustment of the product. Jan explains: "We have sourced our salt from Suprasel — now part of Hengelo Salt Specialties — since the very beginning. Suprasel supplies 100% purified, high-quality salt. This purity is particularly important during the refinement process." But Jan is convinced that it is not just the quality of the salt that matters — the relationship with the supplier is equally important. "Trust is essential. Suprasel is a pleasant and reliable supplier we can depend on. Communication is easy and straightforward. If I run into an issue, we can resolve it quickly. That gives real peace of mind."

Of course, other factors also play a role in supplier selection.

"Price remains important," Jan says. "Cost considerations are always part of the decision-making process." Nevertheless, vacuum salt remains an important element, especially in the standardisation process, and the relationship with Suprasel continues to be valuable. "And that relationship is solid. We have no complaints. They ensure stock availability and never pass problems on to us. And the quality is simply excellent — pure salt without added iodine, which is important for our process."

Continuity

Jan looks to the future with confidence. "Kikkoman is well positioned for the future. There are still many products in development, and we are a stable company that grows every year. We want to continue that growth together with reliable suppliers like Suprasel, so we can guarantee continuity."

Our EcoVadis commitment explained

Mariager Salt Specialties A/S is making sustainability count - and the results speak for themselves. Following its latest EcoVadis assessment, the company achieved a strong score of 70 out of 100, earning a bronze medal and outperforming 82% of all companies evaluated by EcoVadis. It's a milestone worth celebrating, but more importantly, it's a signal of ongoing commitment.

EcoVadis is one of the world's leading platforms for evaluating corporate sustainability performance. It provides an in-depth review of how companies manage their environmental impact, uphold labor and human rights, ensure ethical business practices, and promote responsible sourcing. Using internationally recognized standards and a robust methodology, EcoVadis translates complex sustainability efforts into a clear, comparable score.



Behind this achievement lies a company-wide effort. From reducing environmental impact to strengthening ethical standards and ensuring responsible partnerships, Mariager Salt Specialties A/S has embedded sustainability into the way it operates. The EcoVadis assessment doesn't just validate these efforts – it also provides a roadmap for what comes next.

By building on the current score and addressing identified gaps, Mariager Salt Specialties A/S aims to achieve even stronger results in future assessments. To do that, the company will strive to consolidate policies, enhance transparency, and implement more measurable initiatives across all four EcoVadis themes. Collaboration with partners and suppliers will also play an important role, ensuring that sustainability efforts extend throughout the value chain.

Mariager Salt Specialties' 70/100 score and bronze medal are clear indicators of strong performance — but they are also stepping stones. The ambition is to go further, aim higher, and keep improving year after year by building on this solid foundation.



Do consumer trends lead us – or do we lead them?

Every year, trend reports map where food and beverage consumption is heading. Gut health, protein, indulgence with purpose, justified choices. The language is familiar, the themes recurring. But a more interesting question sits beneath the headlines: are these trends really driven by consumers – or are they, at least partly, created upstream by the industry itself?

Recent insights from Innova Market Insights* highlight six dominant food and beverage trends for 2026, from *Powerhouse Protein to Justified Choices and Beverages with Purpose.* At first glance, these appear as clear reflections of shifting consumer needs: health, simplicity, authenticity, affordability. Yet none of these trends emerged overnight. They are the result of years of technical development, regulatory interpretation, process optimisation and ingredient innovation.

In other words: consumers may validate trends – but they rarely invent them.

Take protein as an example. The strong growth in protein-enriched products across dairy, beverages and snacks is often framed as a consumer-led wellness movement. In reality, it rests on decades of work in formulation science, functional ingredient development and processing know-how. Achieving high protein content without compromising taste, texture or stability is not a consumer insight problem – it is a technical one.

The same logic applies to gut health, hydration or indulgence with balance. These trends depend on manufacturers being able to translate abstract needs into safe, scalable and compliant products. And that translation happens long before the product reaches the shelf.

SALT IS OFTEN KEY

Salt plays a quiet but central role in this process. Often discussed only in the context of reduction, salt is in practice a multifunctional tool that enables many of the trends consumers now take for granted. It supports flavour delivery in protein-rich formulations, ensures microbial stability in fermented products, and helps create the sensory layers that define indulgence. In beverages, mineral balance – including sodium – is critical for functionality, hydration and taste perception. **Without precise control of salt quality and behaviour, many of today's "on-trend" products simply would not work.**

TRENDS DON'T START ON SHELF – THEY START UPSTREAM

Regulation adds another layer. Consumer demand for transparency, sustainability and health must be navigated within increasingly complex national and European frameworks, from iodine fortification policies to clean-label expectations and environmental claims. Here again, trends are shaped upstream. When ingredient suppliers and food manufacturers invest in regulatory expertise, documentation and compliant solutions, **they expand what is possible on the market. That, in turn, shapes what consumers come to expect.**

This is why it is misleading to see trends as something the industry merely reacts to. The reality is more dynamic. Through research, pilot trials, process development and regulatory navigation, the industry continuously creates the conditions for new consumer behaviours to emerge.

So, do we follow consumer trends? Of course. Listening remains essential. But do we lead them? Absolutely.

Trends do not start in the shopping basket. They start in laboratories, production facilities and long technical discussions about how to make food safer, better, more sustainable – and still enjoyable. By the time consumers recognise a trend, its foundations have often been in place for years. And that is where real trend leadership lies.

* Top F&B Trends 2026, Dairy focus for Midwest Dairy, December 3, 2025

COMING ISSUE: "Hengelo – let's dive into the dutch salt site"

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