



Matura thesis at the Kollegium Brig

The youngest entrepreneurs from Upper Valais present themselves at the National Trade Fair

As part of the Young Enterprise Switzerland Company Program, students set up a mini-company and run it for a year. Also in the Upper Valais.

Yesterday, 06:00, Mauro Pfammatter

The National Trade Fair will take place from March 23 to 27 at Zurich Main Station. 75 mini-companies will be presenting and selling their products. Right in the middle of it all are two start-ups from students at the Spiritus Sanctus College in Brig.

The mini-companies were founded at the beginning of the school year. The individual students take on the roles of CEO, CMO, CFO or production manager. They are supported by their teachers and YES throughout the year. In the past, several start-ups created in this context have managed to establish themselves in the business world beyond the school project.

The National Trade Fair takes place as part of the Young Enterprise Switzerland (YES) Company Program. YES offers practice-oriented business and opinion-forming programs for schools in Switzerland. In these programs, children and young people can learn about the economy and the world of work, gain experience and network. In the 2022/23 school year, more than 9,000 young people and hundreds of teachers and volunteers took part in the six YES programs nationwide, which range from primary to upper secondary level.

Each day, 15 mini-companies exhibit at the trade fair. This allows visitors to see new stalls every day. On Saturday, the mini-company «Chipsulina» presented itself.

Organic potato chips with Valais algae

The company produces potato chips from organic Swiss potatoes and flavors them with spirulina algae from Valais. CEO Shana Locher says: «Someone in our team told us about spirulina, which is produced in Valais. We had never heard of it before and saw this as an opportunity to make something that didn't yet exist.» The chips are produced by hand in the canton of Vaud. The potatoes also come from there.

Saturday at the national trade fair in Zurich was a bit «stressful». But it was also exciting - the young entrepreneurs were able to exchange ideas with other companies. Now they are curious to see whether they will get any further or not, Locher continues. In their time as young entrepreneurs so far, they have learned above all how to work together as a team and make compromises.

The students run their mini-company as the basis for their Matura thesis. In addition to selling their products or services, the start-ups take part in a selection process. The best 75 companies qualify for the National Trade Fair. Of these, only a third make it into the top 25 and thus into the national final at the end of May and beginning of June. The winning team will represent Switzerland at international level.

«Regional and sustainable»

On Monday, the mini-company «Valaisnola» exhibited at the trade fair in Zurich. Valaisnola produces a granola mix. The special thing about it is that all the ingredients are from Valais, says CEO Tizian Allet. Depending on the season, Valaisnola adapts the ingredients of the product to seasonal fruits.

As there is no regional and sustainable granola in Valais, the entrepreneurs at Valaisnola decided to fill this gap in the market. Even the packaging is produced in Valais, says Allet. However, finding a suitable company for this was

not easy. As a college student, it is generally difficult to get everything up and running: Getting the ingredients together from all over Valais or finding a production site. «However, we had support from our supervisor and also from our business mentor, baker Paul Mathieu from Susten», continues Allet.

So far, they have been able to gain very good experience and meet great people. The Valaisnola team is even considering continuing the mini-business beyond the school project. Allet says: " «If the circumstances are right, that is an option».

But first Valaisnola wants to make it into the top 25 mini-companies. «We have a relatively good chance. Our product is not only tasty, but also sustainable.» As Allet says, he and his team have put a lot of work into the stand. And last year's winners have given them some tips.

Last year, YES chose the mini-company «beesoft» as the national winner. The start-up was also founded and run by students from the Brig College. «beesoft» was named «company of the year» and represented Switzerland at the European final in Istanbul.



Chipsulina production manager Fabrice Loretan at the National Trade Fair in Zurich on Saturday. Source: zvg