

FSL: A FOCUS ON INNOVATION

The UAE business bridging the gap between global supply and changing regional demand



According to the World Bank, the global food and agricultural sector makes up 10% of the world's nominal GDP. This would value the global food and agriculture industry at a whopping \$8.5 trillion in 2018 and which is forecasted to surpass \$11 trillion by 2024. However, a large portion of this growth will not be driven by the need to satiate human hunger but to satiate the indulgent and curious human palate and our instinct to live a longer and healthier life.

According to Dhruv Dhawan, FSL's Head of Marketing & Innovation, whose father Deepak Dhawan started the business in 1986, innovation and healthier solutions will drive a significant part of the forecasted growth in the food and beverage industry with new flavours, snack concepts, cleaner labels, healthier ingredients and plant-based proteins playing a major part of it.

"The food and beverage industry has been moving in the direction of clean label and health since the turn of the 21st century. This has spurred on an entire new category of cleaner and healthier products and ingredients manufacturers responded early on by creating entirely new sub-sectors of ingredients within the field of functional foods, nutraceuticals, trans-fat free, sugar free, E-number free, fibre enriched and organic ingredients," he explains.

Meanwhile a more recent and rapidly growing trend towards eating more sustainably and ethically has spurred the rapid growth of the flexitarian, vegetarian and vegan diet which is one of the fastest growing consumer trends growing at a rate of 600% per year in developed countries. This trend is now spurring an entire new category of food and beverage products where ingredients such as plant-based proteins, vegan cultures, mycoproteins and lab-grown meat are grabbing headlines while investors line up to purchase stocks of the next Beyond Meat.

"The health-consciousness trend has very much entered this region as it has steadily swept the rest of the world," says Dhawan. "Consumers in our region now read labels very closely in order to make informed food choices. Social media usage disrupts brand loyalty to a great extent while facilitating a shift towards more transparent, healthier and environmentally conscious products."

With its extensive global network of leading ingredient manufacturing partners combined with over three decades of expertise in the Middle East food industry, companies like FSL play a key role in bridging the gap between the global supply of ingredients and the regional demand for finished products.

"We don't just play the role of a sales and distribution company by transporting ingredients from one part of the world to the other - we transport ideas and adapt new relevant concepts to the region while also working very closely with our suppliers to create ingredient profiles that cater to the needs of our market," says Dhawan. "We don't just do oat milk, we do it with saffron and caramel to tickle the taste buds of the local consumer."

This year during Gulfood Manufacturing FSL will be featuring its new product concepts in a dedicated Innovation Lab, showcasing its capabilities and inviting visitors to sample plant-based dairy alternatives, indulgent but healthy food concepts such as flavoured hummus, juices which reduce stress and carry a spicy kick, coffee with cheese and FSL's own Beyond Meat burger, vegan chicken tikka nuggets and plant-based meat strips.

According to Dhawan, FSL's focus this year has been on creating their own unique recipes for plant-based products such as dairy and meat alternatives but much of their attention has been on developing sugar reduction solutions due to the looming sugar tax in the region and on developing trans-fat free solutions in the bakery and confectionery sectors and sodium reduction in the packaged foods sector.

What makes FSL unique and well positioned in the market is its fully equipped, state-of-the-art application lab and team of food technologists who assist FSL's customers with the development of new products, formulations and flavours.

Extensive trials that are continuously taking place in the FSL labs are coupled with the FSL's sales and technical teams' product and market knowledge pool which are then translated into Innovation Day initiatives for their customers.

FSL and companies like it that are focused on the future of food will be essential in the growth of the titan that is the food and beverage industry. Welcome to Gulfood Manufacturing 2019 where innovation is leading the charge and food production is being reinvented!

Find out more at FSL's Innovation Lab at the company's secondary stand near the entrance to Sheikh Saeed Hall 1, Stand S1-B36.