

# Spearheading Food Technologies

Interview: Mr. Zulqurnain Ali Khan, CEO of ZULTEC Group.

Zultec group, head quartered in Saudi Arabia with operations spanning at 23 global sites, started out 25 years ago, which over time became a landmark in the food processing and packaging industry.

"The first thing you realize about starting a business is you have to enjoy risk, because every step of the way, be it designing a product or expanding to a new market, has some element of risk. When you are pushing to the edge of the bubble, there is always a chance it will burst, you can never have zero risk." Zultec's Chief Executive, Zulqurnain Ali Khan knows this better than most. "I enjoy risk, it is good fun and slightly exhilarating. I've always been driven to think of new ideas," he says.

We met with him to understand the nitty-gritty of what makes this company a leader in food processing and packaging technologies.

**How does a company become a leading name in food processing and packaging technologies and remain so over time?**

After successfully operating in GCC and Saudi Arabia, Zultec first started its operations in Pakistan in 1993. We've seen these countries transforming their retail and industrial landscape which really helped us shaping our perspective to do business in Pakistan. We started to make bolder, innovative moves to completely reshape ourselves at an unprecedented rate. What started from retail technologies and basic food processing machines has evolved itself into a conglomerate of 8 different companies with a shared vision of "impacting the lives of millions around us" through innovation in technologies. We covered the missing gaps, repositioned ourselves as engineering and



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process consultants, continued our quest to partner with global brands, experienced hundreds of line integrations and leveraged IT to provide solutions from the manufacturing floor to retail shelves and everything in between. Today, we've established ourselves as world-class infrastructure company operating at 23 global sites and having more than 5000 satisfied customers around the globe.

**Food safety doesn't affect just the final product, but also the entire production cycle and processors reputation, what specifically Zultec has been doing to cater to this?**

Food Safety! That's the buzz word in food processing sector. We've been providing product inspection systems mainly including x-ray, metal detectors and vision inspection systems that do not only cater to the food safety but also address many other things that are required for your production consistencies e.g. fill levels, portion controls, label positioning

checks, seal integrity, barcode readability and weight checks.

Our systems are best in their class. Loma metal detectors offer up to 70 variable frequencies which no other metal detector can do. This ensures highest detection precision of even the smallest metal contamination. X-Ray systems with patented technology that tailors the resolution, depth and scaling to give 25% improved detection with the lowest x-ray energies in the industry.

**More specifically if we ask what equipment works best for inspection of: fluid milk, ice cream, cheese and yogurt?**

The systems that are best suited for the inspection of fluid milk, depending on what you are trying to detect, are either the metal detector pipeline or the X-ray pipeline. The systems that are best suited for the inspection of ice cream and yogurt, depending on the product state, are the metal detector pipeline, the X-ray pipeline or the metal detector conveyor system if packaged. The system that is best for cheese is the X-ray inspection system with the optional X-weigh feature.

**How do you see the importance of marking & coding in the food sector?**

The quality of the food is very important. Consumers love to ensure that they do not eat stale food. So how can you judge if the packaged food is safe and not stale. This can only be checked by the marking & coding of "Production" and "Expiry" date. It also ensures the trust in products and guarantees safe food.

**Which marking technologies are being offered by you and how do you differentiate from your competitors?**

We work with Videojet to provide the best in class coding and marking solutions which enables us to present the broadest range of products and technology platforms to take care of the entire coding

requirements for nearly any material or production environment. In general we provide: Small Character Continuous Inkjet Printers (CIJ) / Large Character Inkjet Printers (LCM), Laser Machines (YAG / CO<sub>2</sub> / Fiber) Thermal Inkjet and Thermal Transfer Overprinters (TTO).

We provide turnkey solutions that enable our consumers to do not simply coding & marking but code validation with additional components including Cognex vision systems. The ability to implement complete track and trace solution along your production line is what significantly differentiates us from any other competitor in the market. The entire product range & after sales services ensure high uptime. With our 23 global sites, we are responsible for Videojet sales and services in Pakistan, GCC, ME and Saudi Arabia.

***Current coding methods such as continuous inkjet seem to work pretty well, what other technologies are making grounds when it comes to coding & marking in food processing?***

Though CIJ has been the workhorse of production lines but our thermal inkjet is going to be the compelling option for food processors looking for improved high resolution coding option. TIJ was

limited to pharma industry earlier. Our newly introduced technology enables TIJ to consistently print and adhere to non-porous materials such as glass, plastics, glossy cartons, foils and films. This is a real game-changer. You see the growth in flexible packaging. With this, now our TIJ can finally help to address the need to mark complex variable data directly on food packaging. This includes certification symbols, expiry dates, batch or lot information, promotional offers, simple graphics or branding and regulatory information such as Country of Origin Labeling (COOL).

***You are accredited as one of the leading packaging equipments supplier, what kind of packaging do you offer in food industry?***

Packaging solutions is what we started with and that's our strongest foothold. We envisioned the growth in packaging formats and truly identified the trends. Today, we offer literally all sort of packaging equipments for fresh food, bakery, confectionery, fruits, vegetables and sweets. Our portfolio includes machines for Thermoforming, Traysealing, Stretch Wrapping, Vacuum Packaging, Horizontal / Vertical Form Fill and Seal.

***There is a huge demand in flexible packaging and bio plastics. Are you in line with this and if yes, what sort of solutions do offer in this space?***

Absolutely true, the global flexible packaging market is estimated to grow at \$248 billion by 2020 due to rising demands in consumer convenience. As more consumers lead increasingly busy lifestyles, demand for convenience products in the personal care, food and beverage, and pharmaceuticals markets is ever increasing. We've also invested significantly in this sector. Either its new production machines in our label converting company or the introduction of more innovative flexible packaging films, we are responding to these rising demands.

***We've seen press clippings about your strategic partnership with LINPAC, can you tell us a little more about this?***

Yes, it's inline to our investment drive in new technologies to deliver smarter packaging solutions. This also complements packaging portfolio. We have joined hands with LINPAC to establish first PET / PP food trays manufacturing facility in Saudi Arabia. The next phase of the project will involve putting up extrusion lines for our films as well. We consider PET as the most pragmatic material for fresh produce packaging while answering the environmental question most practically. We have number of products queuing up to be launched soon.

***Would that be right to say that you are covering all aspects of food technology solutions, what are your corporate goals and where do you see yourself in the next years to come?***

I will take it as a complement but yet we have a long way to go. Though we cover major elements from your incoming materials to processing, weighing, packaging, inspections, traceability & self-adhesive labels but we have to think about the next generation of integrated and more automated production floors. Our goals are always driven by our customers. This customer centricity enables us to create solutions which really address the key problems and this is exactly how we claim that we are closer to our customers. ♦

