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Gulfood manufacturing opens envisioning 360 food factory of the future

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The fifth edition of Gulfood Manufacturing, the Middle East's biggest annual food and beverage processing forum, begins a three-day run at the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) on Tuesday (6 November) with a future-gazing line-up that will see food production experts from more than 60 countries envision 'The Factory of the Future.'

With regional food consumption due to hit 51.9 million tonnes in 2019, according to Alpen Capital, Gulfood Manufacturing is servicing a regional industry facing major investment and tooling upgrades to meet 4th industrial revolution requirements. The adoption of new technologies is widely viewed as the primary enabler in maintaining and building share in a market buoyed by strong consumer demand, yet hallmarked by increasing local, regional and international competition.

Strong market demand has promoted an exhibitor intake of over 1,600 manufacturers and suppliers from over 60 nations and a product line-up which points to a massive, industry-wide transformation.

"Much like any other industry, technology is making itself felt in food and beverage manufacturing sector. Innovative breakthroughs are being unveiled which will lead to the food industry becoming ever more efficient, sustainable, responsible and competitive," explained Trixie LohMirmand, Senior Vice President, Exhibitions & Events Management, DWTC.

Leading projects spur massive demand

With construction work continuing on the US $1.5 billion (AED5.5b) Dubai Food Park project that is being developed within the 550-million square foot Dubai Wholesale City, Her Excellency Mariam bint Mohammed Saeed Hareb Almheiri, UAE Minister of State for Future Food Security, revealed earlier this year the country is also developing a national future food security plan that includes advancing research and adopting technologies.

As food industry-related infrastructure projects in the UAE and across the Gulf fuel investment in sector-specific manufacturing, processing and supply chain solutions, Saudi Arabia's high potential will come under the Gulfood Manufacturing spotlight as the country advances its US$ 500 billion NEOM smart city economic zone, which is helping to send the Middle East's food manufacturing sector into overdrive with its ambitious production and processing plans. NEOM

is expected to lead the way in state-of-the-art technologies, such as arid and seawater farming and solar-powered greenhouses, leveraging high-grade technology to grow and process food in entirely new ways.

With anticipated domestic sector growth of 5.9% until 2020, according to Euromonitor International, major food sector buyers from Saudi Arabia - the Arabian Gulf's biggest food producer and exporter – are attending Gulfood Manufacturing to source next-generation food processing products and expediate the country's development agenda.

"Food processing worldwide is undergoing a blistering pace of change brought on by technological innovation and the region's food-focused approach to smart city adoption – with the UAE mulling the setting up of a 'Silicon Valley' of food technology - are catapulting the Arabian Gulf into the global elite of the food processing industry," said LohMirmand.

Supply chain ecosystem advancements under Conference spotlight

With innovation permeating the entire Gulfood Manufacturing programme, a probing Foodtech Summit, running November 7 and 8, will raise the shutters on the 'Factory of the Future.' Led by industry-specific experts, summit goers will explore how next-gen technologies, including artificial intelligence, digitalisation, the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT), automatisation, robotics and blockchain will transform food and beverage manufacturing. The programme will also explore future food security and how the industry can innovate and create alternative food supply chains and resources.

Tailored Innovation Tours to guide buyers

More than 35,000 industry players, including some 2,000 C-level executives being hosted in a 'Big Buyers' programme, are expected to visit Gulfood Manufacturing, which will also feature innovation tours and demos. The tours and demos will serve up deep insights into the technologies on offer on the show floor across five dedicated sectors: Ingredients, Processing, Packaging, Automation & Controls, and Supply Chain Solutions.

"The Innovation Tours will be an early alert system for the industry's future with participants taking in examples of robots working among humans at production lines, or high-speed machines with capacity to churn out bags at 200 units per minute," explained LohMirmand.

Awards recognise industry leaders

Meanwhile, DWTC is looking to further push the innovation agenda with its Gulfood Manufacturing Industry Excellence Awards, which this year take a futuristic and innovative approach. Open to show exhibitors, 10 awards will reward and recognise innovation across the entire industry eco-system from ingredients, to technology, waste prevention to customer service, packaging and marketing. The awards are decided following assessments by a panel of independent judges.

“This robust programme combines into one of the most valuable business advancement platforms ever seen in the international food production sector,” said LohMirmand. “The event has demonstrated remarkable growth over the last five years, much of which is down to Dubai’s ability to serve the emerging markets of Africa and Asia.”

Gulfood Manufacturing 2018 will be open from 10 am – 6 pm on 6-7 November, and 10 am – 5 pm on 8 November. The show is only open to food and beverage trade professionals.

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