

**EXCERPTS FROM AN
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH
DR. D. JAYACHANDRAN,
MANAGING DIRECTOR, MEAT
PRODUCTS OF INDIA,
KOOATHATUKULAM**

*Dr. Shibu Simon
Editor*

Q: Meat Products of India, Koothatukulam is considered as one of the pioneering institutions in the production and marketing of meat in Kerala. What are the reasons behind the wide public demand for your products?

A: This is primarily due to the peculiarity of consumers in Kerala. Consumers in Kerala have a trust in products marketed by the government. For example despite there being many milk brands available in Kerala, MILMA milk is most sought after. Consumers have faith in such products.

Q: Are you able to meet the demands of the customers? If not, what are the reasons and constraints?

A: No. This firm was set up in 1968 with Danish technology. The same old machines are still being used and this affects the efficiency of the plant. We will have to go for high output machines and modernise the plant.

Q: What were the primary objectives/goals of MPI when it was started?

A: The modus operandi of the company is to convert the meat from animals grown at farmers premises to value-added products for the market and share a part of the profit with the farmers through buy-back scheme. This company also ensures an assured and prompt market to the farmers and avoids middlemen. This is the only government company in India engaged in production and marketing of meat and meat products. The company also produces various kinds of good quality feed for pigs, poultry, rabbit, quails, turkey and duck in order to meet the demands of MPI farms as well as supply to farms of AHD, KAU, KSPDC etc. The company owns a rabbit breeding farm of capacity 300 rabbits and a poultry farm of 15000 broiler chicks per cycle. The company has direct tie up with farmers by providing compounded livestock feed and young animals and buy-back scheme when these animals are fully grown.

Q: Do you think that the goals initially envisaged have been fulfilled?

A: No. The cost of beef production in Kerala is very high.

So we are procuring cattle from Tamil Nadu where you can get beef at half the cost whereas other animals are being procured from Kerala, pig from KLDB, and by purchases from private farms in Kerala, chicken from our own farm in and around Koothattukulam, and ducks from Allepey.

Q: What is the maximum production capacity per day? What is the present output?

A: Plant has a capacity to slaughter 30 pigs per day whereas we are slaughtering almost 60 pigs per day. The deep freezer capacity is 10MT. The plant has a capacity to produce 500kg beef per day. The actual production of beef varies depending on the availability of animals and on some days goes upto 1.5-2.5 tonnes per day-by overtime working and all we adjust..

Q: You have been selected as the new M.D very recently. Do you think you can make the firm economically viable? What are your plans?

A: Certainly we can bring in desirable changes. We have a lot of limitations. If the government can show some leniency then definitely we can make the firm economically viable. This unit can be converted in to a training centre of international standards. Last year the Government of Kerala has sanctioned some money for replacement of some machines and the purchase is half way through. The next priority will be to replace the existing refrigerator, boiler and poultry-dressing unit. All these changes involve huge financial outlay, the poultry-dressing unit itself will cost around 25 lakhs.

Q: What about the work culture of the employees? Are you satisfied?

A: The staff here on the whole is polite, obedient and understanding. We can take them into confidence and it is possible to make positive changes in the functioning of this company. The average age of employees is about 52 and so as you know there can be some problems in their work efficiency.

Q: Despite being a company with products that have a good public demand, what have been the major impediments in opening franchises in major cities of the state.

A: We are seriously looking into it. And for that we are planning to have a market study first. At present many posts here are vacant and this poses some problems.

Q: Do you think in future when we start slaughter houses and meat plants they should be in the private sector or in the public/government sector?

A: Ideally it should be in the government sector provided illicit slaughter should be stopped and tax should be uniformly enforced.

Q: Have you conducted any market surveys to understand the characteristics of your buyers such as which strata of society they belong to?

A: At present we have no problem in marketing our products and a need for market surveys has not arisen so far. Our major buyers are KTDC, Star Hotels, Southern Naval Command, Cochin Refineries, VSSC besides a few supermarkets and dealers.

Q: Besides the production unit, do you have a research division?

A: No. We are planning to start a research division and a full-fledged laboratory. The Government of India may provide funds through HRD to start a full fledged training institution.

Q: In what all aspects do you seek the help of the AHD, which has an organised network all over the state?

A: A Very pertinent question. We can make use of manpower of the AHD. Unproductive animals from farmers in the state can be purchased at a reasonable price. In fact I have a plan to identify and buy unproductive animals from the dairy farmers in Ernakulam and Kottayam districts and I have sent a questionnaire to ERCMPU to explore the options. The veterinarians in the AHD can help in this regard and farmers can be benefited from such a scheme, as no middlemen are involved.

Q: Have you got any certifications like ISO, HACCP or GMP?

A: No. It is possible to achieve ISO standards within two years. For HACCP we need thorough infra structural changes.

Q: What are the common Postmortem findings in different species?

A: We make thorough ante mortem examination and reject animals suffering from any disease. But very rarely on post mortem some lesions like TB nodules are seen and on such occasions the carcass is outrightly rejected.

Q: What are the extension activities you undertake to make the public understand the importance of meat as a part of diet? Also, people have a preference for fresh meat rather than frozen meat. What are the steps taken for creating public awareness in this regard?

A: Per capita consumption of meat is increasing day by day so no further push is required. Regarding preference for fresh meat that attitude is also changing due to changing lifestyle. At present we don't have any funds for extension activities. It would be needed in future.

Q: In Kerala, veterinarians do not have a significant role in public health areas. However if you closely watch the conditions in the developed countries we can observe that vets do have a very important role in this field- especially in meat inspection procedures. Do you think it is time for the government to improve the public health of the state by involving vets in various public health activities particularly the slaughter houses? What are your recommendations?

A: This is a very serious matter and it is high time that the government takes steps to involve veterinarians in public health. This is a very serious issue. Steps should be taken to open modern abattoirs at the block level and qualified veterinarians should be appointed to manage and coordinate block level veterinary public health activities. Such a veterinarian should have full authority- that is freedom conferred with legal powers- to stop illegal slaughter. The Director of Animal Husbandry could be the licencing authority. MFPO (Meat Food Products Order) committee should be formed as a statutory body under Director of Animal Husbandry. Excess meat produced at any of the scientific slaughter houses can be marketed through MPI.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Dr. Sanjay Joseph and Dr. Iyas Ahmed of 1993 batch of COVAS, Mannuthy have come out in flying colours in All India Civil Service Examination 2003 with ranks 141 and 291 respectively.

Dr. Sanjay Joseph, a native of Vaikom, Kottayam, did his postgraduation in MSc. Dairying from NDRI in 2001. He was working as Veterinary Surgeon, Veterinary Dispensary, Vellore, Kottayam. His wife Dr. S. L. Suleka is working as Veterinary Surgeon, T. V. Puram, Kottayam.

Dr. Iyas Ahmed, native of Ambalapuzha, Alapuzha did his postgraduation in Livestock product technology from IVRI in 2001. He was doing his Ph.D. at IVRI.

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