

Skylark expands to supply quality chicken



India's Skylark Group is upgrading and expanding its broiler operations to cater to a new processing plant on the outskirts of Delhi. **CHAKRIT RIDMONTRI** reports that Skylark's move conforms to the growing demand for hygienically processed chicken in India.



Skylark expects its processing plant to run at full capacity by early 2007. The company is also in the midst of establishing modern commercial broiler farms.



Jagbir S. Dhull

The Skylark Group's new modern commercial broiler farm in the northern state of Rajasthan is expected to come on stream in 18 months. It will have a total of 1 million birds in 50 houses divided into

seven plots of land on a 135-acre complex.

Skylark's Managing Director Jagbir S. Dhull said the birds would be reared in closed sheds equipped with a climate control system and automatically fed using a silo based feeding system.

"We need a modern farm because we expect high quality birds for our processing plant. With better

housing equipment and biosecurity, we can expect healthier birds that are free from coccidiosis," he said.

According to Mr Dhull, Skylark has already acquired the land and when completed, it will not only be Skylark's first, but also north India's first modern commercial broiler farm.

Setting a trend

Skylark's move into modern farming at commercial broiler level is likely to set a trend in north India and elsewhere in the country.

Since the bird flu hit India in early 2006, greater awareness was drawn to the safety of hygienically processed chickens creating a gradual switch among consumers. This trend has been growing and demand for hygienically processed



A range of processed chicken products from Skylark.

◁ chicken at Skylark and other processors in India has since doubled.

Mr Dhull however said, that it is not easy for integrators or processors to maintain high safety and quality standards if they rely on contract growers for live bird supplies.

"No matter how modern the breeder operations, if contract farms are not developed and closely monitored, safety and quality issues are bound to surface," he said.

To maintain the growth in processed chicken consumption, he said integrators should lift commercial broiler production standards, either by upgrading the contract farming operation or setting up a brand new production facility.

Expansion

Despite the bird flu, Skylark continued with its expansion plans, confident that the outbreak would have a positive effect on consumption of hygienically processed chicken.

In April 2006, Skylark opened a modern processing plant at the Food Park in HSIDC Industrial Estate outside Delhi.

It is equipped with semi-automatic processing equipment from Meyn that has a capacity of 1,000 birds/hour. The capacity can be doubled to 2,000 birds/hour without interruption of the operation.

Skylark added another feather to its cap in August 2006 when it launched 'Nutrich' its branded processed chicken, which is sold as whole and deboned meat in bags and tray packs wrapped in PVC.

The opening of the plant made Skylark the first modern chicken processor in Delhi. Its products are the only branded processed chicken sold in the capital of India.

"Our processed chicken production is expected to reach full capacity in early 2007, and if viable, we will double our capacity," said Mr Dhull.

According to him, the plant is in the process of certifying to international standards on food safety such as GMP and HACCP.

And to meet the growing demand for feeds when the commercial broiler farm is completed, the group is doubling capacity of its feedmill in the state of Haryana to 400 tonnes/day. ■



Skylark Group

Haryana-based Skylark Group is one of the most diverse poultry integrators in North India.

Founded in 1980 by Managing Director Jagbir S. Dhull, the group is well known as a supplier of Hubbard broiler and Bovans layer DOC in North India.

Mr Dhull ventured into the breeder business in 1985 with a flock of 1,000 parent stock (PS). Today, the group stocks 300,000 broiler PS and 150,000 layer PS, producing 2.5 million broilers DOC and one million layer DOC per month.

Each month, it places two million broilers DOC at its contact broiler farms scattered throughout north India. They have a combined capacity of five million birds. The rest are for commercial sale.

Skylark pays a growing fee to the contract growers, then buys back market-sized birds and sells them to middleman.

Seeing this as a setback, the group decided to get into the processing business in 2006. Processed chicken from Skylark's plants are all frozen and sold to shops in Delhi as well as to the army.

Skylark also has an incubator business, which was established in 2000 to manufacture and sell incubators.

Its incubators, also branded 'Skylark', are fully automatic with each having a setting and hatching capacity of 30,000 eggs and 10,000 eggs respectively.

Skylark sells about 150 incubators/year.

Skylark is one of the most diverse poultry integrators in north India. Its operations cover the entire broiler supply chain from breeder to processing.