

MAN ON A MISSION

CEO WAEL ITANI EXPLAINS HOW THE GENERAL POULTRY COMPANY IS TRANSFORMING FROM A LEGACY TABLE EGG PRODUCER TO OWNING 'FARM TO TABLE FRESHNESS' AND PROVIDING QUALITY, NUTRITIOUS FOOD THROUGH INNOVATION AND ENGAGEMENT.

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Wael Itani is not put off by the imports of regional table eggs from the likes of Kuwait, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Nor is the CEO of General Poultry Company (GPC) deterred by international table egg imports from countries including Turkey and India.

For Wael knows that with the Bahraini consumer's preference for freshness, he holds the winning ticket. "Freshness is key for expanding our production and reducing the nation's reliance on imports," he says. "GPC currently fulfills 65 per cent of the local production of fresh eggs, which translates into 18 per cent of market share."

Wael goes on to explain that close to 67 per cent of table eggs consumed in Bahrain are imported. "With the expansion of our farms, we intend to change the existing dynamics of the market and capture a 42 per cent share overall," he says.

Established in 1977, GPC is a wholly owned subsidiary of Mumtalakat Holding Company, which is the sovereign wealth fund of Bahrain. As part of the country's aim to achieve complete self-sufficiency, GPC is targeting a 100 per cent increase in production to meet local demand for fresh table eggs amidst the many stringent food safety and biosecurity regulations.

It was the opportunity to be a part of this crucial change that enticed Wael to the role of CEO in 2019. A seasoned fast-moving consumer goods professional,

Wael brings with him 27 years of commercial and business development experience with multinational companies such as Sony, Imperial Tobacco and Energizer, and across multiple geographic regions including the Middle East and North Africa, the Gulf Cooperation Council and India.

"GPC offered an interesting challenge that coincided with my career path and experience in bringing change to an existing business model," Wael says. "In this case, it was the consolidation of GPC as the first choice of consumers for fresh Bahraini table eggs and the poultry industry in Bahrain in general, and Bahrain's positioning in poultry farming amid regional and international standards."

GPC has partnered with German company Big Dutchman for eight state-of-the-art farmhouses and Moba from the Netherlands for the grading and packaging facility. Both are leading names in poultry and egg production, grading and packaging equipment.

Construction of the farms has been awarded to Bokhowa Group, a leading local Bahraini company that will complete the project in May 2021.

The new facility will commence operations in the third quarter of the year and will boast several advanced features such as automated grading and packaging technology, limited human intervention and live data streaming.

"Our biological assets will be safeguarded in a well-balanced and protected environment throughout our rearing and laying cycle," Wael says. "With the



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GPC'S TRUSTED QUALITY CERTIFICATIONS

As a major contributor to Bahrain's government food security program, GPC offers quality assurance through these ISO certifications awarded by international quality certification organisations.

TUV NORD CERT GMBH DIN ISO 45001
TUV MIDDLE EAST ISO 22000
TUV MIDDLE EAST ISO 14001
TUV MIDDLE EAST ISO 9001
TUV MIDDLE EAST HACCP
FSSC 22000

deployment of state-of-the-art technology in our farms, GPC will operate at globally recognised standards in the poultry farming and table egg production industry, on par with regional and international players. This will be a significant milestone for us."

GPC will also be a major contributor to Bahrain's Food Security and Safety program by offering quality assurance through the ISO accreditations awarded by international quality certification organisations.

The company's response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic has been similarly comprehensive. GPC implemented a series of rigorous, precautionary measures and procedures to ensure the safety of the team and produce, and the continuity of the business cycle.

Wael explains that expanding their facilities, along with rebranding, new packaging, enhanced product mix and transformation to data management

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represent GPC's migration milestones towards a professional entity that draws upon advanced technology, freshness and customer satisfaction.

"This is a transformation that is fully supported by GPC's Board, Mumtalakat Holding Company and Bahrain's wise leadership – all of which have helped bring the project to life," he says.

While GPC's primary business is centred around poultry farming and the sale of fresh eggs, it will also endeavour to drive growth through value-added complementary by-products such as specialty eggs and liquid eggs. "We're driven by the values of passion, integrity, respect, teamwork and initiative," Wael says. "We seek to stand out with our quality, freshness, customer service and an innovative approach."

He is bullish about the future. "The road to our growth and success calls for setting specific goals, coordinated teamwork and focusing on what matters most. We still have ground to cover, but this is the most exciting part and it's a journey that I am enjoying immensely." ■