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Considering the market volatility, supply chain disruptions, energy costs, and workforce scarcity, what does this past year look like for your company when you draw the line?

The food industry is blessed in such a way that no matter what the world is facing, all the people still need to eat. Combine this with trends such as convenience, affordable and sustainable, the potato industry and its related products is positioned very well. Automation is a key driver related to workforce scarcity that will remain at the forefront. The SureTec 240P versatile cutting/dicing machine in combination with the SureCut Unit is an answer to those needs in addition to our Volantis, V-belt slicing machine and the Centris centrifugal slicing/shredding machine.

What are your expectations for 2025, keeping in mind the legacy of 2024, but also the current challenges?

As middle class continues to expand, convenience will remain primordial with time being the most luxury item. As other regions in the world fall more and more in love of the versatility of our beloved spud, it will add more fuel to the engine. Due to culture differences, preferences might defer, so a copy-paste approach will not be warranted. It's always important to remain close to your customer and ask the relevant questions while avoiding assumptions.

How do you estimate the market will evolve and what is your priority list for 2025?

The market will remain attractive and continue to grow. Flexibility, quality and reliability are vital elements of the potato processing industry. Therefore we'll vigorously invest in continuous improvement through feedback from our customers and lessons learned. Customer centricity, although becoming a buzz word, is not just a bullet point on a corporate presentation. It is how you can supply added value and make a difference one step at a time.

Where did the growth opportunities come from and what is the most important lesson you have learned in recent times?

Next to the increase in demand of the Asian and LATAM region, one of the other main drivers being comfort food at an affordable price for the end consumer, will further propel growth. QSRs are clearly in a pole position with fry servings as one of the most popular items on their menu. People's busy schedules is putting convenience at the center and the take away business or delivery at home is gaining popularity. As most processing companies already invested heavily in automation, good margins can be achieved if you're close to the industry demands.

What strategies are you implementing to maintain a competitive edge in an increasingly saturated market? How do you prioritize your investments versus your R&D efforts?

At FAM STUMABO, we'll continue to invest in new developments. As scarcity of people will remain (to increase): improvement in automation and ease of use need to be at the forefront. With the launch at the Interpom of the SureTec 240P, our versatile high-capacity French Fry cutter / potato dicer featuring the SureCut Unit we're being part of the solution. Setting up the machine is easier and much faster, which decreases human errors while increasing uptime, throughput and quality. Although generic machines handling multiple applications might help your own organization drive standardization, at FAM STUMABO we're convinced that certain segments/applications within the food industry require their dedicated solutions.

What was unexpected in 2024 and how did it impact your business?

Increase in demand for different and unique shapes in order for potato processors to differentiate themselves. The classic straight French fry will not lose its pole position but consumers do like to enjoy a different bite, experience different sensations thanks to alterations in forms and dimensions. As FAM STUMABO wants to contribute in creating even more potato related moments of happiness, we're working closely with our customers to unlock those hidden shapes and formats out of our beloved tater.

Which are the most important drivers of change for your business in 2025? How do you plan to prepare for them?

As a global supplier it is important to have a 'glocal' representation of our brand across the globe. Therefore we are continuously expanding our local presence either through our own subsidiaries or through our local partners. All potatoes are not created equal, due to different varieties, different growing conditions, local preferences, etc. FAM STUMABO and our partners therefore heavily invest in local test and demonstration centres.

What would you like to see happening in 2025 for your stakeholders and business environment (in terms of policy, regulations, and market) in order for your business to thrive more?

What's on everybody's mind due to the current political environment, how will new regulations interfere with business. Let's hope that we can find a way and continue to use common sense and prevent outrageous tariffs and promote free and fair trade. It's for the companies then to make sure they are set-up for success, rather than for governments to extend their bickering onto the economical battlefield.

What is your vision for the industry over the next five years, and how does your company plan to contribute to its growth?

All our feelers indicate continued growth. FAM STUMABO is making significant investments in order to continue to answer to this growth by not only expanding our production capacity but also to increase coming up with new developments providing answers to certain bottlenecks and unlocking new possibilities. •