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# ADVANTA SEEDS HELPS TO FEED a hungry world

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*Claudio Torres, Chief Executive Officer of ADVANTA SEEDS, says global demand for food is expected to further grow as the population expands.*

**O**f the numerous challenges facing the world today, none perhaps could be more pressing than food security, especially given the expectation that the global population is likely to peak close to 10 billion by the mid-century, according to **Claudio Torres**, Chief Executive Officer of ADVANTA SEEDS.

The latest United Nations projections point to a 33% increase in the number of people on the planet from the current 7.3 billion to 9.7 billion by 2050. This, said Torres, is one of the factors that have been driving an uptrend in the global seed market, which is expected to become an US\$85.24-billion industry by 2018.

"There are several components affecting this growth, the main one is population growth," he said. "Next is people's growing disposable income, which increases demand for a much higher protein diet, i.e. meat. And a large quantity of crops such as cereals, grasses, etc. is involved in the animal feeding process."

The rapid rate of urbanisation worldwide also means that there is less arable land for farming, while water scarcity presents itself as another daunting fact. Considering all of these elements, Torres noted that there is a growing challenge for the industry to start mechanising and using technology to be able to produce food.

"It's a very challenging environment, but the good thing is there's a consistently growing demand for our products because food is a necessity for human survival," he added.

## STEADY GROWTH

ADVANTA SEEDS, which has been producing hybrid seeds for the past 40 years, has presence in 20 countries worldwide with its global headquarters located in Dubai. Torres said the decision to move their corporate office to the emirate was based on the UAE's strategic location, allowing them to seamlessly serve their various commercial offices across the globe.

"Dubai is centrally located and it offers great connectivity to anywhere. We're almost always on non-stop flights to markets where we do business," which include India, Southeast Asian, Australia, New Zealand, Africa, South America, North America and

Europe, the CEO added.

The company has 16 production facilities spread all over the world and located as close as possible to the 60 countries where they ship their seeds to. Torres explains that on a global scale, ADVANTA SEEDS focuses on four crops: corn, sorghum, canola and sunflower. ADVANTA SEEDS has a leading market share globally of sorghum, which is a type of drought-resistant forage crop grown for its unique benefit as animal feed.

ADVANTA SEEDS also adopts a regional approach to producing other types of global crops like rice and vegetables to meet the specific requirements of certain geographies worldwide.

As a result, the firm's growth has been impressive. Last year, its bottom line increased by 32%, and as a publicly listed company on the Bombay Stock Exchange, its share price has steadily increased from INR103 on January 1, 2014 to around INR520 as of September 18, 2015.

## GLOBAL COMPANY WITH ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

Torres said ADVANTA SEEDS competes with major multinational players in the global seed market, but its competitive advantage can be attributed to a combination of its products, its market approach and – more importantly – its ability to maintain a very close relationship with its customers so it can better understand their needs.

"We're a small, but a truly global company with 800 employees. We have a flat organisational structure that allows us to be closer to our customers. People do not need to go through many layers or channels, for example, to meet the CEO," he quipped.

ADVANTA SEEDS is also investing in building an agile and diverse workforce, capable of quickly responding to the ever-changing requirements of their customers.

"We're a very special company because it promotes a nice mix and balance between an entrepreneurial venture and a big corporation. We try to have the best of both worlds. We invest heavily in people because we believe they are one of the most important components of a successful organisation," he said. "We're constantly looking for agile people, who

can comfortably make decisions, but are committed to the company's objectives."

## PASSION FOR AGRICULTURE

A native of Chile, Torres, who has been in charge of ADVANTA SEEDS for the past two years, said agriculture represents a major part of his life.

"Chile is a major exporter of agricultural products, so growing up, I saw agriculture as a very attractive industry," he narrates. "True, it's not as glamorous as other industries, but I think it's extremely important for the development of society. It has a lot of social impact, and that's why I decided to become an agronomist."

An agricultural engineer by training, Torres started his career, literally, in the field, before moving to the corporate/commercial side of agriculture. After earning his Master in Business Administration (MBA) degree, he received opportunities to work in various countries including Brazil, Singapore, the United States and now the UAE.

## MANAGING FOOD SECURITY

As ADVANTA SEEDS growth continues to motor along, Torres said the company is actively engaging with governments, local universities and their customers in various regions in order to share their knowledge and technology so they can develop joint programmes to help solve specific food-security-related challenges.

"In the GCC, for example, we have been collaborating with government agencies and universities in Al Ain (UAE) and in Saudi Arabia. There are several approaches on how to manage food security issues for each country," he said.

And while some governments worldwide may see that producing everything locally is the only way to secure food supplies, Torres believes that this is not a sustainable solution as certain types of crops only grow in certain places.

"In our discussions with governments, we highlight the importance of producing crops that the country has the capacity to produce, while having the right regulation in place to allow the export and import of certain types of products and seeds," he said.