



IQBAL FAZLANI
CEO, Fazlani Exports
Pvt. Ltd.

Pioneering Microwaveable Packaging for Convenience

The ready-to-eat category is expected to double in size and rake in INR 50 billion by 2023 with a CAGR of 12%. Food manufacturers are looking to adapt better technologies to extend the shelf life of packaged goods and deliver on nutritional fronts as well. A pioneer in the use of high barrier retortable packaging, Fazlani Foods offers a wide range of ready-to-eat products that come in microwaveable packaging and provides a healthy alternative to fast food and take-away meals.

Specializing in ready-to-eat solutions and ready-to-use ingredients, Fazlani Exports Pvt. Ltd. provides quality products to Indian and international customers under the brand name, Fazlani Foods. Starting off as an export-oriented business, the company has a vast supplier reach in the USA, the UK, New Zealand, Australia, the Middle East, South Africa and Russia. In addition, they now market and sell their products through a strong distribution network in India as well. Due to the change in buying preferences and also in the lifestyle of Indian consumers, the firm saw immense potential in the ready-to-eat segment in Indian markets and started retailing here on a small scale in 2012. Their target customer base includes anyone that requires ready-to-eat packaged Indian food in the

modern format. This target list comprises individuals living away from their family, those with tight work schedule, people residing abroad without easy access to raw materials needed to make Indian dishes at home and individuals who simply may not have the time to cook everyday.

Fazlani Foods provides solutions in the form of ready, packaged meals that are nutritious and home-made. The firm's product line boasts of a delicious range of vegetable curries, seafood curries, rice, pickles, chutneys, combo meals in tray packs, cooking pastes and desserts, made from recipes that are crafted from the finest ingredients and spices. With a shelf life of 18 months, their products constitute the same nutritional elements as a freshly prepared meal. With hygienic manufacturing processes, Fazlani Foods aims to provide end consumers with





customers alike. There is a lack of awareness not only around the segment but also about the technology of retortable packaging. Consumers in countries like the USA are aware of the benefits of this packaging technique and know how to interact with products that use it. The challenge that we perceive is the mind set or perception that the average Indian consumer has toward packaged food. Indian consumers still harbour questions about the presence of additives and preservatives in packaged foods. They aren't yet comfortable with the fact that the food they are consuming has been sitting on a shelf for more than 15 months without even seeing the inside of a refrigerator. The technology of retortable packaging is not easily understood or trusted to be natural and healthful. In addition to awareness being an inhibiting factor for the category, the availability of food in India also has a role to play. A consumer looking for a quick meal late at night can conveniently call a food service outlet and get a hot, freshly prepared meal delivered to him or her in a short duration of time. That contributes to the decreased popularity of the ready-to-eat segment. Our loyal consumers are often well-traveled, aware of our unique packaging technology and trusting in the nature and quality of packaged materials.

Outline your company's vision for the future.

Our plans for the future, as a brand, are very straightforward and aligned. We want to become synonymous with the ready-to-eat food category and lead the way in terms of market share. We want to enter every buyer's grocery list and become a regular household name.

Which key markets are you targeting within the country?

We do a lot of business in the West and Delhi-NCR. Bangalore, Hyderabad and Pune also feature as key markets in the South. Kolkata is a key selling area in the East. Our products are available at retail chains of different formats to service all kinds of grocery shoppers. To make the most of online retail

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only the best packaged food in the market. Emphasis is placed on preserving the natural health benefits of all ingredients and their entire value chain from procurement of raw material to final packaging and transportation of finished goods is supervised to ensure ethical and professional standards.

The company packages its products in high barrier retortable pouches, trays and bowls. A user can simply cut open the pouch, place it in a microwave and heat it before consumption. There is no need to empty the pouch into a different container for the purpose of heating. The packaging is microwaveable and does not contaminate the food with harmful plastics or synthetic agents on exposure to microwave radiation. The technology makes the use of a product easy and quick, and enables shelf storage for 18 months without the use of refrigeration. This acts as a differentiating factor for the brand and fulfills the need of the modern consumer.

CEO **Iqbal Fazlani** spoke to Progressive Grocer about the growth of his company and the reformist technologies that have aided convenient solutions.

How do you view the growth rate of the RTE category? What challenges act as hindrances for food manufacturers in this segment?

This category is very nascent and has only now started winning the attention of retailers and

WHAT IS RETORTABLE PACKAGING?

A retort pouch or retortable pouch is a type of food packaging made from a laminate of flexible plastic and metal foils. It allows the sterile packaging of a wide variety of food and drink handled by aseptic processing, and is used as an alternative to traditional industrial canning methods. The food inside is cooked in a similar way to pressure cooking. This process reliably kills all commonly occurring microorganisms, preventing it from spoiling. The food-grade, FDA-approved materials used to construct this type of packaging undergo a sterilization process that extends the shelf life of the product inside while preserving all nutritional constitution of the food item.





channels, our products are also available on Amazon, Flipkart and BigBasket across all major locations. We are planning to venture into and penetrate newer Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities in the coming year.

Our current production and infrastructural facilities are capable of handling increased product demand. We are prepared to cater to the growth of the RTE category and are ready to process four times the volume we handle currently.

Describe your retail strategy and how you approach product placement.

My retail strategy is very clear and specific in nature. I focus on placing the right products at the right locations. We conduct thorough market research and believe that our entire product range need not be available everywhere. We place products at stores where we know we'll find prospective buyers. For example, my ready-to-eat range is more readily available at major modern trade outlets and my range of chutneys, pickled jars and pastes are more visible in neighborhood/next-door grocery stores. We maintain a healthy balance between our online and offline channels. Once we have a more defined product range to offer and a loyal, substantial consumer base, we also plan to open an exclusive online store.

Any plans for rural markets in India?

At the moment, there isn't a strong demand for ready to eat products in rural India. However, as these regions transform, we may witness a surge in the

consumption of products like ready to use sauces, pickles, chutneys and pastes.

Throw some light on your sourcing strategy and product certifications.

We follow global food safety standards like BRC and USFDA. We are also certified for ISO 22000:2005 and Halal. Our raw materials are procured from industry suppliers only after undergoing strict quality checks pertaining to their nutritional content, size, cultivation methods etc. We have an entire quality check department dedicated to this purpose that maintains consistent quality, health and hygiene standards for raw materials.

What marketing initiatives and campaigns do you take to market your products?

We do a number of sampling activities that focus on demonstrating the convenience and health attributes of our products. Such marketing initiatives are conducted in-store at all modern trade outlets. We have also designed an intensive outreach program this year that includes TVCs, digital marketing initiatives on various social media handles, outdoor city-specific advertisements, search engine marketing, and print advertisements.

What are your expansion plans for new product lines and infrastructure?

Although we plan on investing in newer technology, our infrastructural facilities are capable of handling larger volumes of manufactured produce and are tuned to servicing increased demand. However, we plan on extending the range of products we offer. Some product lines we are looking at comprise of healthy snacking items, organic combo meals and a hummus range. It has been a balanced year for us and we are still testing the Indian market in terms of growth opportunities. Going into the future, we plan on venturing into new geographies to scale up distribution and offer a more diverse product range to our customers. **PG**

PRODUCT PORTFOLIO

Award-winning products: Dal Makhani, Amritsari Chole with Basmati rice and Dry Fruit Mango Chutney.

Best-selling products: Shahi paneer, brinjal curry, amritsari chole, dal tadka, rajma masala, pav bhaji, palak paneer, prawn biryani, kashmiri prawn curry, chipotle Mexican rice, brown rice pilaf and ready meals packaged with basmati rice. Pickles and chutneys have variants such as tuna, prawn, sweet mango, spicy mango, lime and chilli, tamarind, mint, and coriander. Ready-to-use sauces and pastes come in flavours such as rogan josh, tikka masala, vindaloo, onion tomato, ginger-garlic, green chilli etc. To provide an appetizer and dessert to their main offerings, the company produces a chocolate caramel pudding and an entire soup range under the brand name, Foody Fusion.

Price Range: Rs. 70 to Rs. 260