

The Raghavan Report

Global food & feed security: Asia's priorities

by Raghavan ('Ragha') Sampathkumar



I was speaking at a conference where the audience were predominantly from animal-agribusiness sector across Asia. In terms of growth, the region particularly South Asia and South East Asia are growing relatively faster than their neighbours. Observing the depth and range of conversations, a few points emerged clear and I present those as crisply as possible here. **1. Feed security is oft-neglected concept:** While the entire world is aware of the importance of food security for survival of the human race, often we forget the underlying issue that animal

protein is an integral part of our diets and it needs to be affordable too. When food prices at the consumer or wholesaler levels rise, everyone seems to be highly charged. However, prices of feed ingredients and raw materials are, for long and continue to, remain volatile. This doesn't always raise the alarm among the stakeholders. But, imaging the cascading effect of price escalation in meat and other protein that are power-packed with nutrients.

2. Alternative feed ingredients are becoming affordable and attractive: Owing to intensive research on feed formulations and technological advancements in using alternative feed ingredients such as algae, seaweed and other biomass in the recent years are bearing fruition. Worldwide, more focus is being given to ensure these feed ingredients that are not mainstream right now, will be widely used in the near future so that the prices of traditional raw materials can be kept at an optimal level. Further, some of the ingredients are environmentally-friendly too. So, they are really promising and this particular segment is set to evolve further with time.

3. Sustainability is now a business-mandate: More and more evidence start emerging that it makes economic and commercial sense to invest in improving the sustainable models of production and doing business. For example, to get protein, we need to feed animals, protein. Then we need to extract protein from the waste to use it again in the feed and that closes the loop. This is a simpler narration of the protein cycle but this can be applied to any material that is used as feed raw materials.

4. Food safety is a shared responsibility: As I repeatedly mention that food safety is a greater responsibility that transcends organizational and sectoral boundaries. Hence, every link and every entity in the food chain must understand their responsibilities and act accordingly. For example, media must be cautious and scrupulous to first understand the truthfulness of any story or claim that is being made by anyone. Since consumers today are getting heavily influenced by social media, their perceptions get shaped and based on which, their opinions are formed on any subject or issue. This ultimately resonates in public policy making impacting the entire value chain.

5. Consumers are becoming more demanding but more confused as well: It seems to be an interesting trend that the consumers are expecting more from the industry in terms of transparency on how food is produced until it reaches their plates. However, they seem to be more confused about it as they are bombed with information from every corner. Ultimately, at one point they seem to raise their hands up in the air and say "hey, I just don't get it". It is the responsibility of the food industry and all concerned to ensure their questions as well as myths and unfounded claims are addressed appropriately through all possible channels.

Raghavan Sampathkumar is a food and agribusiness leader with a 360 degree understanding of the complex Geo Political, Environmental, Socio Economic, Techno - Commercial and Cultural perspectives of Agri Food value chain. He worked in various subsectors including agro inputs, international trade, biotech, and animal nutrition across Asia-Pacific and currently he is with Compound Livestock Feed Manufactures Association (CLFMA) of India as its Executive Director. He regularly writes for international publications on agri-food trends, food security and sustainability themes. Also, he pens his poems and thoughts in his personal blog - www.asmalltownkid.wordpress.com.