

SMESpotlight

Keeping farm produce safe from pests and diseases

Asiatic makes and distributes chemicals worldwide to help farmers increase their crop yields

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The business of bringing food from farm to table has gone global, and home-grown Asiatic Agricultural Industries is doing its part.

The local manufacturer of crop protection and public health chemicals has a mission to aid food security and safeguard public health through its business.

It manufactures and distributes a wide range of agrochemical products, such as insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and crop nutrients, which help farmers in controlling pests and diseases to increase crop yields.

Asiatic's public health arm, Asiatic Specialty Products, was established in 2005 and manufactures products targeted at controlling urban pests and disease vectors.

Since its founding in 1972, Asiatic has grown its distribution network to cover South-east Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent. In recognition of its internationalisation strategy, Asiatic won the Enterprise 50 Award for the first time last year.

GOING GLOBAL, GROWING LOCAL

Asiatic began as a local trading company. Its founder Chan Chik Wai would travel from farm to farm on his bicycle selling agrochemical products.

From the onset, Asiatic saw greater business potential in other markets compared with the smaller domestic market in Singapore.

In 1977, it made its first foray overseas into Sabah, Sarawak and India. Since then, overseas expansion has not stopped.

Liaison offices were set up in key markets such as Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Rwanda, Kenya, Ivory Coast and Lebanon. These offices helped to expedite the process of obtaining the local certifications and licences needed to operate in new markets.

Mergers and acquisitions are also a key part of Asiatic's growth strategy. In 1982, it acquired a Norwegian company and gained the expertise to begin manufacturing its own products in Singapore.

In 2006, Asiatic established its foothold in Africa by acquiring a German company that had been its African distributor since the 1990s. The company now has a presence in Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Ghana, and the Ivory Coast.

With its manufacturing facility in Singapore, it is able to command a higher price premium by providing quality solutions that are tailored to its customers' needs.



The Asiatic Agricultural Industries leadership team: (from left) marketing director Andrew Chan, chairman and technical director Chan Chek Chee, founder and director Chan Chik Wai, who started the company in 1972 by going from farm to farm on his bicycle selling agrochemical products, and managing director Lawrence Chan. PHOTO: ASIATIC AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRIES

A crucial part of Asiatic's success formula is its dedication towards building long-term relationships directly with its customers.

"Customers appreciate that we are committed to them. By understanding their needs and customising solutions for them, we are able to build strong relationships with them," said its marketing director Andrew Chan.

The company regularly visits farmers to understand their problems and provide solutions. Field demonstrations and farmers' meetings also serve as opportunities to connect with the local farming communities. Asiatic also organises exchange programmes for its customers in different countries to encourage learning and explore new opportunities.

As the spectrum of pests and diseases may vary widely from coun-

try to country, Asiatic also partners with local stakeholders to conduct efficacy trials in order to produce the right agrochemical products for the market.

In Myanmar, Asiatic has established its own technical development team to collect market intelligence on the ground such as the latest product trends, as well as receive feedback and suggestions from customers.

Innovation is also a key focus area. The company works closely with government agencies and educational institutions to develop new products and improve existing ones. It also utilises its research farm in Myanmar to experiment with methods to harness technology, such as the use of drones for chemical applications and crop surveillance.

Asiatic recently launched Crop-

Solv, a mobile app that allows farmers to submit photos or videos of their crop problems and receive technical support in real time, such as product recommendations and directions to nearby stores carrying the products.

In spite of environmental and regulatory challenges, Asiatic remains committed to building long-term relationships while contributing towards food security and public health. Said Mr Chan: "We want to create an Asiatic community of like-minded professionals among our distributors and customers who are dedicated to providing quality products and solutions."

The writers are students at the National University of Singapore Business School. This series is part of the Enterprise 50 Educational Project.