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MEETING



The committed Growel Management Team: From Left M.V.N. Sessa Chary, Dr A. Victor Suresh, Sandip Ahirrao and P.S. Narendra

**'Growel' the name synonymous for success in Indian aquaculture for over two decades**

## Growel Feeds, the long term commitment for Indian aqua feeds completes one year in shrimp feed

Growel has 120,000 tonnes shrimp feed – 180,000 tonnes fish feed production capacity annually

**A**fter making a mark in the fish feed market in India since 2010, Growel Feeds entered into the shrimp feed segment and established itself in all the shrimp and fish growing states in the country. In an exclusive interview at their feed plant at Chevuru in Krishna District, A.P, the management team, the Executive Directors, Mr M.V.N Sessa Chary and Mr P.S. Narendra, and Head-Marketing, Mr Sandip Ahirrao, talked to Aqua International, Editor, Mr M.A. Nazeer on its venture into the growing fish and shrimp feed market and their future plans.

**Chevuru, Krishna District:** Growel Feeds Pvt Ltd, relatively a new entrant into India's large and established aqua feed industry, has completed first one year of its shrimp feed producing operations and five years in fish feed production. The company which began producing floating fish feeds in 2010 at its factory in Chevuru village, Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh, started with one extrusion line and added another line to double its capacity in 2011.

In December 2013, as part of its overall aqua feed business plan, Growel Feeds opened a new factory with five shrimp feed lines, next to its fish feed plant premises. It is the most modern plant in India with three pellet mills, the latest design in single screw extruder and a twin screw extruder. This demonstrated Growel's long term vision for the shrimp and fish feed market not only in India but also for the region.

Growel Feeds has a production capacity of 120,000 tonnes of pelleted shrimp feed and 180,000 tonnes of extruded fish feed annually.

### From concept to fish feed production

It began in 2006 when the US Soybean Export Council organized a visit to China for potential entrepreneurs in aqua feed production from India with the aim to demonstrate the usage of floating feeds in other Asian countries and use of extrusion technology for fish feed production. This impressed Growel group who were already one of the

most successful aquaculture healthcare products manufacturer in India, and decided to invest into this new business venture.

Mr M.V.N. Sessa Chary, Executive Director, Growel Group said, "A year later, we seriously considered a project for fish feed manufacturing and started Growel Feeds in 2008. By mid-2008, we identified few internationally acclaimed machinery suppliers to execute the project. By March 2010, we produced our first batch of extruded fish feed.

We achieved full capacity for this 10 tonnes per hour extruder in June 2010 and I am glad that Mr P.S. Narendra, Executive Director, Growel Feeds, pushed us to install a second extruder line of 15 tons per hour. We finished this expansion in September 2011. Farmers were encouraged to use floating pellets when they saw the good feed conversion ratio (FCR). Dr Victor Suresh, Technical Director, Growel Feeds, guided us with fantastic feed formulation program to achieve full potential, he stated.

Today, the company produces fresh water fish feeds mainly for the Pangasius, Catfish and good volumes for the Indian carps (Rohu and Catla), Pacu, Tilapia, Sea Bass and Cobia.

### A.P's fish feed market at 500,000 tonnes

Mr Sandip Ahirrao, Head Marketing, said, sales in 2013 reached 110, 000 tonnes of fish feed and Growel Feeds could get a leading position in the fish feed market in Andhra Pradesh.

However, we do enjoy healthy competition with other major players. Growel Feeds with a larger production capacity has sales all over India. Andhra Pradesh has the largest fish feed market at 500,000 tonnes. The fish feed market is estimated at only 50,000 tonnes in the northern states such as Bihar, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, and about 5,000 tonnes in Tamil Nadu and Odisha. In India some 98% of the fish feed produced is used for grow-out farms. There is the practice of stocking stunted one-year old Pangasius fish into grow-out ponds. This segmentation in farming results in less demand for starter feeds which account only 1 to 2% of feed production. The exception is in Odisha and West Bengal where both locally and imported starter feeds are used. We have strong technical support team of 140 members all over the country, he added.

### Growel Feeds Formation

Growel Feeds was founded by Growel Formulations, Mr Narendra and a few other leading personalities in aquaculture. The name Growel was taken from the 20 year old Growel Formulations Pvt Ltd, founded by Dr M.S.Ranga Chary, who did his Ph.D in



A view of Growel Shrimp Feed Plants

Front and entrance view of Growel Feed plant



Pharmacology from Germany and he is the chairman of Growel Group.

### As market matures, need for better products

Mr P.S. Narendra, Executive Director, Growel Feeds said, "The forte of Growel Group is the supply of feed, feed supplements and health management products to fish and shrimp farmers. I personally feel that because of our entry first into fish farming, we have enjoyed some stability in this business. "We believe that there is potential for growth, both for fish and shrimp feeds. The installed capacity for fish feeds in India is more than current demand, and as the market matures, there will be a need for better products."

### Growel's Tilapia initiative

In the case of Tilapia feeds, the company markets a small volume as the growth of Tilapia farming has been slower than expected. Growel's sister concern has the license to import Tilapia brood stock and their hatchery has completed the domestication of the Chitralada Tilapia strain, imported from Thailand five years ago. It is now ready

to supply fry and fingerlings to farmers. The constraint to an expansion in farming is the requirement for permits from state authorities to farm Tilapia and bio-security protocols to prevent escapes into local waterways.

"We know that in areas where the Carp is the traditional fish, consumers'



Latest technology extruder imported from USA

preferences have shifted to the Tilapia. The meat is similar but without interstitial bones. This is similar to the trend in Bangladesh and other Asian countries. But here, because of Government restrictions, its farming has not taken up as fast as in the region.

### The best for shrimp feeds

From the moment they entered into the aqua feed business, Growel had its eye set on the shrimp feed business. This is in line with the long term vision of Growel to be part of the large and growing aquaculture industry. Thus in December 2012, the team sat down to plan for its production of shrimp feeds. Subsequently, the choice of equipment demonstrate that this energetic and forward looking team wants to focus



**M.V.N. Sesa Chary, Executive Director**

on producing the best in shrimp feed quality for the industry.

**Twin screw extruder gave us opportunity....**

“We have made big investments in equipment. We bought three pellet mills from Muyang. The two twin screw extruders from USA which gave us the capacity to produce high quality aqua feeds. In shrimp feeds, there is room for product innovation to bring out the best in formulation and physical properties of the feed to improve efficiency.”

Mr Narendra informed that their new infrastructure now resolves this chicken-and-egg problem and offers an opportunity for the marine fish feed sector to grow.

**120,000 tonnes shrimp feed, 180,000 tonnes fish feed production capacity**

Mr Sesa Chary stated that they also planned for versatility in production

with this equipment. The twin screw extruder can be used for marine fish feed, ornamental fish feed and pet foods. We can operate the twin screw extrusion lines at 7 to 8 tph. The total capacity for shrimp feed production will be 120,000 tonnes per year and 180,000 tonnes extruded fish feed production capacity annually. The team has the expertise of Dr A. Victor Suresh who has been guiding the technical division at Growel Feeds has been instrumental for the feeds successful development since the beginning and he also guides the in-house R&D centre.

“If we look back at the pelleting technology in shrimp feed processing, we see that vast improvements in physical properties of pellets have been achieved with pre and post conditioning. Now the standard is 3-4 pass conditioning in the new pellet mills. As the next step, extrusion will allow us to include ingredients that cannot be included in pelleting and therefore create innovative products physically and nutritionally. Growel will be using a state of the art formulation technology with in-built ingredient valuation tools that would take advantage of the vast amount of ingredients that are available in India.”

**Management's commitment to R&D**

Dr A. Victor Suresh, Technical Director of the company, based out of Singapore, said that a major factor in the success of Growel Feeds is the management's commitment to R&D. “Growel has committed to support the industry and has invested in R&D systems that provide the ability to



**Dr A. Victor Suresh, Technical Director**

run reliable feeding trials on fish and shrimp, and evaluate ingredients and feed additives. We are setting up a process research centre that would allow testing formulations and process parameters at a pilot scale and also produce experimental diets for feeding trials.

We are already seeing greater understanding of feed management optimization which directly benefits the farmers. Our top most priority in R&D is to provide farmers with products, services and tools to be the most productive and profitable. Most of Growel's Directors are also into fish farming themselves, so they keep challenging R&D to provide them value for their money.”

Growel has a R&D farm with 120 cages to check shrimp growth and FCR with different formulations from time to time. To create awareness about good farming practices among farmers, the company is conducting farmers meetings every week area wise. In the past two years, Growel had organized over 100 meetings and

**‘Growel's top most priority in R&D is to provide farmers with products, services and tools to be the most productive and profitable. Most of Growel's directors are farmers themselves, so they keep challenging R&D to provide farmers value for their money.’**

workshops with farmers and explained about feed management and better management practices (BMP) and cleared their doubts. Growel Feeds has a dedicated Technology Development Manager for technical services, trials and dissemination of knowledge to farmers.

**Feed Brands**

In February 2014, Growel began marketing its pelleted shrimp feeds with two brands each for Vannamei and Monodon shrimp. The *Marigold* and *Nutriva* feeds for Vannamei shrimp contain 36 to 34% crude protein, while the *Tigeron* and *Nutrivo* feeds are for Monodon shrimp with 41 to 38% crude protein.

**Processing Plant to start in May 2015**

A downstream integration of the group

is ongoing with the construction of an ultra modern sea food processing plant, a few kilo meters away from the feed factory. As a feed producer, the advantage of having a processing plant is to help feed clients to market their harvests. The boom in Vannamei shrimp farming has resulted in demand for more processing capacity.

Growel is coming up with a state of the art shrimp processing plant with automation including grading with a processing capacity of 60 tonnes of shrimp per day (finished product). This ultra modern processing plant will come into operation in May 2015.

We have our roots in fish farming and always want to cater to the needs of fish farmers. So, we are also setting up fish processing plant to cater to the rising demand for processed fish from the retail and food service sectors,” said Mr P.S.Narendra.

Mr Sesa Chary further stated that when we process fish, it will be for the fish markets with the best export potential. Now, our Pangasius is sold whole chilled in India, to wholesale merchants who in turn retail either whole fish or fillet the fish for the chilled and frozen markets. This shows a demand for Pangasius fillet or steaks for a new group of consumers who are averse to preparing fish but see its health benefits.

**Competitive edge**

Aside from the advantage of having a strong dealer network and close ties with farming community farmer network, it also helps that Directors



**P.S. Narendra, Executive Director**

are directly involved in aquaculture. Between them, they produce a total of around 8,000 tonnes of fish and shrimp per year and use 10 per cent of the fish feeds produced at Growel Feeds.

Mr Narendra, Executive Director said that they have been benchmarking their feeds which they believe are nutritionally better than several others in the market. Aquaculture is close to our hearts at Growel; we live right in the middle of farming areas and have close relationship with the farming communities. This not only allows us to understand farming issues but also can make quick decisions. In feed marketing, this is how we differ from some other groups. I would say that we



Growel Feeds R&D farms ponds and cages near its feed plant



Model image of Processing Plant



Growel Shrimp feed products

have one of the industry's largest team of qualified field staff. We focus on having Technical field staff rather than sales staff. For the marketing of the current volume of fish feeds, we only have few non-technical sales staff.

After all, it is in line with our commitment to serve the large and vigorously growing aquaculture industry in India with the best in class products and services," said the young knowledgeable and committed, Executive Director, Mr Narendra.

Growel group's ambition is to sell shrimp feed wherever shrimp culture is there in the country & in Asia

**Social Service:**

Growel is also doing lot of social service to the people of the area around the factory premises as a corporate responsibility like providing RO drinking water to 10 to 12 villages with in 5 kms range of the plant. Every day 60,000 liters of pure drinking water is being

**"Growel is the only feed company with its own R & D ponds"**

supplied to the villages.

The company has 450 employees in the feed plant directly and about 700 people are working indirectly there apart from the large distribution network it supports.

**Moving forward**

Growel's plan for growth also involves diversification into marine fish feeds.



**M.V.N Sesa Chary and P.S Narendra with their other directors of Growel Feeds, from left Sateesh Ravella, Janardhan P, Sudheer Chintapalli and Srinivas Potluri during the inauguration of feed plant.**

It has the technology and knowledge to produce marine fish feeds for the Indian market.

According to Growel Feeds management, the major challenge in Indian fish culture segment is species diversification which is not happening. Even Bangladesh has over 20 species in fish culture, whereas in India, we have only a few.

With regard to Vannamei shrimp culture, Mr Narendra felt that poor quality of seed is affecting the industry's prospects. Narendra felt the need of separate ministry for Fisheries/Aquaculture at national level and we need pro-active policy by the government for the development of aquaculture industry in the country. There is a need of better coordination among government bodies for better development of this sector, he stated.

**Dr Victor's knowledge and commitment...**

Mr Sesa Chary and Mr Narendra told, 'Because of Dr Victor Suresh we



**A.P. CM Chandrababu Naidu in a recently held Aquaculture Expo in Vijayawada**

went ahead in establishing the plant looking at his knowledge, integrity and commitment.

Dr Victor Suresh said that in India, marine fish farming is currently constrained due to the lack of feeds. Farmers cannot produce marine fish without cost effective and performing feeds, whereas feed manufacturers cannot invest in costly technology to produce high quality feeds without a steady demand and breakeven volume.



**Red Tilapia**

**Dr Victor Suresh**, basically a shrimp nutritionist, received his BSc in India, his Masters in Thailand and Ph.D. in the United States of America. He started his career as the Global Director for Aquaculture in Ralston Purina; a company that pioneered in shrimp farming and feeds for marine shrimp among the market leaders in the shrimp feed business. After returning to Asia, since 2001, he has been providing technical service to aquaculture nutrition companies globally. In 2007, he returned to shrimp nutrition research by undertaking the establishment and operation of a shrimp nutrition research facility for tiger shrimp in the country of Brunei Darussalam and for Vannamei shrimp in Hawaii. He has been associated with Growel Feeds from its inception in 2009 by taking care of its feed formulation technology and R&D. He lives in

Singapore with his family and visits India on a monthly basis to work on the technical matters.

**Dr M.S. Ranga Chary, Chairman of Growel Feeds**

who holds a doctorate in pharmacology from Frankfurt University, Germany said that the vision and mission of the company is to commit to have sound business practices to ensure world-class product quality. We have been consistent in fetching top-notch



**Dr M.S. Ranga Chary, Chairman**

results for the aqua-farmers. The name 'Growel' was coined to help aqua farming community to grow well. We do not compromise on quality and we ensure that products are delivered on time, he added. As one of the pioneers in the formulation of aqua healthcare products, he started Growel Formulations in 1992. With more than 50 years of post-



**Sandip and his team with Nutriva**

qualification experience, he remains to be a guiding factor for the group and actively takes part in the group operations.

**About Head Market, Sandip Ahirrao**

Mr Sandip Ahirrao, Head-Marketing, Growel Feeds Pvt Ltd, is an aquaculture professional (B.F.Sc, M.Sc - Mariculture) with a rich and varied experience of more than 27 years, out of which the initial 10 years were spent in the Shrimp farming sector working for Unilever Group and other reputed corporate farm companies. Next 17 years he had been into Sales and Marketing of Aquavet products for various bluechip Indian companies as well as MNCs like Wockhardt (Biostadt India Ltd), Novozymes, Biologicals Inc, USA, Lallemand Inc, Canada etc. He has also exposure in aquaculture sector in South East Asian countries including 4-year stint in Indonesia.

Sandip is known for his deep knowledge of aquaculture, long experience in Sales & Marketing and for his skills in building a vast professional network throughout. He is a linguist of sort - proficient in six Indian languages. He looks after sales and marketing of aqua feeds of the company.



**Growel Feeds Booth in a trade exhibition**



**Farmer and Growel team displaying growth of Shrimps with Growel feeds**



**How the fish swallowing the feed**



**Growel Shrimp feed marketing team**