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INTERVIEW

"Solutions help to identify problems at early stage"

Monday, 13 February, 2017, 08 : 00 AM [IST]



Janani Foods Pvt Ltd, located in Hyderabad, is an IT-enabled agri services venture that provides innovative, personalised and customised services at the farm gate by using latest technologies. The company has formed a strategic alliance with renowned companies like IBM, Bayer CropScience, DuPont, e-Sagu, and ICICI Bank for its agro advisory services, quality inputs supply, financial support, agri insurance, marketing services, post-harvest management, IBM's spoken web and more. Through its services, the company addresses the back-end supply chain solutions in food industry, helping farmers to get a quality output, and adding value to the output thus giving maximum benefits to the farmer.

Sundara Rajan S, chief executive officer and director, Janani Foods Pvt. Ltd, in an email interaction with **Harcha Bhaskar**, talks about the company's various solutions and plans to adopt an e-platform for its services and auctions. *Excerpts:*

Tell us about your company. What are the various services offered by the company and for which commodity/products?
 Janani Foods Pvt. Ltd is promoted by professionals from food and agri industry. Though the company was registered in 2003, it commenced its pilots from 2005-06. Janani Foods is primarily formed with an objective of processing fresh fruits and vegetables. Later, we realised that getting right quality of fruits and vegetables (raw materials) consistently in huge quantities is a challenge. We, therefore, decided to focus on this issue of back-end supply chain before getting into processing.

We joined hands with International Institute of Information Technology (IIIT), Hyderabad, and conducted pilots with the eSagu (eAdvisory) project to understand the issues involved in getting quality produces from farmers. In this process, we created kiosks in cluster of villages and provided advisory services, input services, financial services and market linkages to farmers. These pilots helped us to conceive and develop integrated services model to farmers at their farm gate.

This model is adaptable to any commodity, though we did our pilots for cotton and chillies. Subsequently we also associated with IBM, India, to develop the Smart Rural Aggregator Platform (SRAP) and ICT platform to link all stakeholders of agriculture to provide agri / rural related products and services. We provided financial services to the farmers through ICICI Bank.

The market linkage services were piloted in association with NCDEX and National Collateral Management Services Ltd (NCML). Today we have an Integrated AgriServices Model which is tested and proven successful.

These services help the small farmers to improve the quality, reduce the



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cost of cultivation and get better prices. On an average, the farmers earn at least 15% more per season by availing our services.

What is the technology used in production of commodity, processing, post-harvesting, marketing and service delivery?

Production of agri produces by farmers

In Janani's Agro Advisory Model, the farms and farmers are registered at the beginning of the season to record the details of the land, soil, water availability, crop, previous years history, etc. A trained field executive of Janani visits the farmers once a week or 10 days to collect the crop status data. The crop status, weather and problems are entered into the software loaded in a tab. He also takes pictures of the affected parts of the crop and all the information is uploaded from the field using mobile network. Our crop specialists access this information immediately and provide the right solution, which is downloaded by the field executive and instantly informed to the farmers for his action. The solutions are also sent by SMS to the farmer in the local language. This helps to identify the problems at early stage and thus help farmer to reduce the cost of treatment, improve the quality and get better prices.

Post-harvest management

Janani's Integrated HortiProcessing Project would create a cold chain infrastructure from farm to market

- Pre-cooling at village collection centres (to be promoted by farmer groups)
- Pre-cooling, ripening chambers and cold store facilities at aggregation centres (to be promoted by farmers as "Farmer Producer Companies")
- Integrated packhouse at FPCs
- Controlled Atmospheric Storage infrastructure by Janani in districts

These would help reduce the post-harvest losses (upto 30%) and increase the shelf life of the produces.

Processing

Janani would establish a Centralised Processing Plant in a Food Park and process the fruits, vegetables and spices being procured by it from the farmers.

Modified Atmospheric Packaging; High Pressure Processing; Various food processing technologies to convert the fresh produces into value-added products (ready-to-eat, ready-to-cook); Fresh and cut fruits and vegetables.

Marketing

Janani would market the fresh and processed produces by following strategies: Directly from the farm to the buyers; Fresh Produce from the cold stores or Controlled Atmospheric Storages; MAP/HPP produces through large format super markets; Processed foods using FMCG distribution channels; Nearly 40% of the products will be exported using the export channels.

eQuality Assaying

Janani, along with Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Kolkata, is working on eQuality Assaying equipments to instantly test the physical and chemical qualities of the agri commodities. These equipments would be deployed to test the qualities right through the value chain. This would help to produce the better quality agri produces, maintain the quality in the supply chain and get quality-based prices to the farmers.

Service Delivery

Services will be delivered to the farmers as well as buyers by the following entities:

- Village Level Kiosks (by farmer groups) to provide advisory, input services to farmers and also act as primary collection centres.
- Aggregation Centres (by Farmer Producer Companies) to aggregate the input supplies, collection from the villages and provide farm equipments on hire to farmers, financial and insurance services to farmers. They will also have post-harvest management infrastructure to supply the fresh produces to buyers.
- A dedicated IT and communication infrastructure would be deployed to ensure transparency and speedy delivery of products and services at lower costs.

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Which is the current project the company is working on?

Last year, Janani, along with the horticulture department, Government of AP, implemented "Chillies Quality Improvement Programme" in Guntur district, AP. We provided Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices training to 20,000 farmers spread over 220 villages. We also piloted a marketing model, where the chillies farmers deposited their produce in our designated cold storage. We drew samples from them and got quality certificates from accredited labs. With this certificate, we linked the farmers to buyers and the farmers got at least 15% more price realisation.

Based on this experience and success, this year, we are providing IPM services to nearly 1,000 farmers who pay for our advisory services.

We are also likely to launch an eQuality-based eAuction Platform for Chillies in January 2017 for which we are in discussions with the Government of AP. Here again, the platform would assess the quality of the chillies brought by the farmers to our Direct Purchase Center and seek highest prices from the buyers based on the quality through an eAuction Platform.

We are concurrently working on our Integrated HortiProcessing Project, explained earlier. We have already submitted our preliminary Detailed Project Report (DPR) to the Governments of AP and Karnataka, which are under processing. We have signed MoUs with the Governments of Rajasthan and Haryana for the project in those states. Our project proposal is under consideration by the Governments of Jharkhand, MP and Gujarat.

Based on our success in chillies, we intend to replicate it for jasmine flowers in Madurai district in Tamil Nadu.

Tell us about your initiative in chillies. How will this benefit the farmers?

We provide IPM Package of Practices to chillies farmers to improve the quality and establishing the eQuality-based eAuction Platform. Both these together would help chillies farmers to produce better quality, store the produce in cold storages till the market prices are conducive for selling, get higher prices based on the quality of the produce through our auction platform.

How much is the chilli production in Hyderabad? Which places distribution and exports take place?

The states of AP and Telangana produce over 60% of chillies in India. Exports take place predominantly to Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, south-eastern countries, Middle-East. Pesticide residue- free chillies are exported to the EU, USA and Japan.

How is the need of each sector different from other? Accordingly, how do you customise your services and products?

Our model is generalised in nature and can be adapted by any agri commodity. The customisation is in the nature of the advisory, post-harvest management practices.

Currently, what is the R& D happening in the company? When is the output expected?

We are working on the Modified Atmospheric Packaging process R&D for different fruits and vegetables with our associates. It will be an ongoing process.

In the eQuality Assaying, we are working on following projects with C-DAC Kolkata - Heatvalue for chillies; Pesticide residues in fruits, vegetables and spices; Turmeric quality assaying.

What are the new services projects you are likely to introduce in coming 2-3 years? You will be looking at which markets?

We will be deploying the Integrated HortiProcessing Project across different states in the country.

Tell us about your technical staff. What kind of training do they go through?

We propose to employ experienced and qualified technical staff. Being first-of-its-kind projects, the training is generally on the field.

Are there any new acquisitions or launches scheduled by you for coming years?

We are looking for investors for our forthcoming projects. Therefore there may not be any acquisitions.

What are your views on regulations for food processing and agriculture sectors in India?

Regulation in food processing is must. But instead of concentrating more on declarations on labels, the government should focus on quality, specially the raw materials being procured by the industries. Otherwise the farmers would not be changing from their existing practices which are detrimental to agriculture in the long term.

Agrarian crisis is enlarging by the day. Government should address the issues in an integrated way than attempting fragmented steps.

Tell us about your partnership with various other organisations with regard to your projects. How does the alliance work?

We have informal tie-ups with Multivac India – the Indian arm of German MNC for providing MAP and HPP technologies; Lloyd Insulators for post-harvest management infrastructure; IBM for ICT network; eAgriSarathy for agro advisory platform; C-DAC, Kolkata, for eAssaying equipments; NCML for post-harvest storage and quality certification.

Where are the storage centres for the company? How well equipped are they as per industry standards?

At the moment, we only lease the storage space from approved ones.

Explain your franchise model. How it is a win-win situation for both parties?

It will be absolutely difficult for Janani to do everything on its own in the back-end (villages) in view of the volumes and varieties. We are therefore going in for franchisees in villages to operate the kiosks to provide agri-related products and services to farmers. The revenue will be shared between the franchisees and Janani in pre-agreed percentages for different services, based on investment, cost and efforts. Therefore the franchisees would better good returns on their investment and Janani would be able to concentrate more on front-end and expansion.



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