

Millers gather in Tanzania

by David McKee

IAOM Mideast & Africa Conference, held in a sub-Saharan country for the first time, draws nearly 500 participants

The 19th Annual International Association of Operative Millers (IAOM) Mideast and Africa District Conference and Expo, held for the first time in a sub-Saharan country, drew nearly 500 participants and 60 exhibitors to the city of Arusha in northern Tanzania Nov. 14-17.

With Mount Kilimanjaro looming just to the east and the famed Serengeti plains stretching to the northwest of the conference site, attendees listened to presentations on the latest technological developments in milling, were briefed on wheat crop conditions in all major exporting regions, visited vendors' display booths and networked with their professional colleagues.

Said Salim Bakhresa & Company Ltd., East Africa's largest milling company with operations in six countries, hosted the event. The company's executive director and chairman of the conference, Abubakar Said Salim Bakhresea, in his welcome speech touched on several challenges facing millers in East Africa, where high world wheat prices exacerbated by import tariffs have caused a decline in wheat flour consumption.

In her remarks, Tanzania's Minister for Industries, Trade and Marketing, Dr. Marry Nagu, talked about the world food crisis and grain production problems facing Tanzanian farmers due to a doubling in fertilizer prices.

The conference was organized jointly by Bakhresa staff and the recently established permanent IAOM Mideast and Africa District office in Muscat, Oman. Praise was nearly universal from participants for the quality of the technical and educational program and from exhibitors for the number of millers and grain companies visiting their stands, many of whom were at the event for the first time.

In addition to the traditionally strong showing from Middle Eastern countries, at least 15 African nations, ranging from Algeria to Mozambique to Zambia, were represented by milling professionals.

Martin Schlauri, head of Buhler AG's milling business unit, called the IAOM "an opportunity for us to show our latest technology to a large audience and also to thank our customers by sponsoring an evening."

Another exhibitor, Pietro Barbalaga of Omas S.r.L., said: "It was our first time in Tanzania, and it was a positive show. We understood there was a good interest for Italian systems. We found an agent for the market and collected a few quotation inquiries."

Companies offering functional ingredients and instrument manufacturers saw particularly heavy traffic at their booths. The region's millers have been increasing their use of wheat from Black Sea origins. However, the quality of this wheat is less reliable than traditional sources, which means relying more on laboratory analysis and the use of flour improvers.

Laurent Clair of Chopin Technologies observed, "At last year's IAOM, we introduced the benefits of our empirametric method to the millers, and this year we had strong interest in our interpretative tool that makes their lives easier."

The higher profile of grain traders at the annual event was also a noticeable trend this year. Perhaps in recognition of the increasing share of the world's wheat exports accounted for

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The First African Flour Fortification Workshop

In conjunction with the IAOM Conference, millers, public health officials, scientists and representatives of international organizations convened Nov. 17-20 in Arusha, Tanzania for The First African Flour Fortification Workshop. Among the 130 participants were delegations or individuals from about 20 African countries including a large contingent from West Africa.

The event, conducted in English and French, provided a forum for exchange of experiences in fortification of wheat flour with vitamins and minerals at industrial mills across the continent. Experts provided a global status report on fortification and shared the latest international recommendations on fortification standards.

In most of sub-Saharan Africa, wheat flour milling has been expanding thanks to urbanization and changing diets, but countries are at different stages when it comes to fortification. At the forefront are South Africa and Nigeria, the continent's largest economy and most populous country, respectively. Both countries have had mandatory fortification for several years.

In the "getting going" category are Ghana, Ivory Coast, Sudan, Uganda and Zambia, according to information presented at the conference. At least 14 other sub-Saharan countries were classified as "getting serious" or "getting started."

In East Africa, fortification has yet to take hold, except for wheat flour and maize meal produced for the World Food Programme. However, thanks to a grant from the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), Uganda's 10 wheat flour mills are expected to mostly start voluntary fortification in 2009.

Roy Loepp of Seaboard Corporation, which operates wheat flour mills in a number of African countries, summarized fortification issues from a corporate perspective. "(What's) not a problem for millers is understanding it is good, sourcing fortificants and incorporating them into the flour," Loepp said.

Problems for millers include "cost, public education, equitable enforcement of national standards, corruption, attending meetings and pursuit of the ideal 'kitchen-sink' solution."

He clarified the latter as the desire to put every vitamin and

mineral possible into flour including Vitamin A, which increases by several times the cost of fortification. Loepp suggested that such extra cost is a major incentive for non-compliance. Underfortifying by 50%, for example, could enable a typical mill to increase its cash flow by 12%.

Loepp explained that for many years Seaboard has fortified the flour at most of its mills as a matter of corporate social responsibility and best milling practice. Two years ago, voluntary fortifying began at its mill in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Globally, the flour fortification movement has emphasized the benefits of iron and folic acid in reducing anemia and birth defects. In Africa, however, Vitamin A has received more attention, and so its pros and cons in relation to wheat flour were discussed at some length. Proponents argued that the problem of Vitamin A deficiency and weak immune systems is so severe in Africa that not just vegetable oil, but every possible food vehicle should be targeted. Others countered that the specially coated Vitamin A needed for dry addition to wheat flour and sugar is four times as expensive as that used in edible oil. This can push the cost of fortification above the maximum 2% of production cost used as a rule of thumb for the feasibility of fortification programs. Other factors are thin profit margins in wheat flour milling, degradation of Vitamin A in storage and baking, and the difficulty of effectively monitoring Vitamin A levels in flour.

Fortification at maize mills was also a topic, since maize meal is a major food staple in many countries, particularly in southern and eastern Africa. The obstacle to feasibility is the large number of non-industrial mills in contrast to wheat milling, which is nearly 100% at commercial roller mills in the region.

Participants estimated that in Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi only 5% of maize is ground at large mills, while in Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda and Zimbabwe that figure is still low at 30%. Small village hammermills account for the rest. In South Africa, fortification of maize meal is done at large mills, which represent 60% of overall production.

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Conference Chairman Abubakar Bakhresa, right, receives a plaque from IAOM President Royal Denning. Photos courtesy of David McKee.



Daniel Wambeke of SCAFCO and Jocelyn Leveque of Vigan Engineering were among the exhibitors at the conference.

by the region, the traders have stepped up their visibility by exhibiting, making presentations and sponsoring parts of the program. In addition to longtime Mideast & Africa District supporters U.S. Wheat Associates (USW), Canadian Wheat Board, Australian Wheat Board and France Export Cereales, companies such as Cargill, Louis Dreyfus Commodities, Bunge, Noble Resources, Concordia Agritrading, Glencore Grain, Nidera, The Ontario Wheat Board and the Ukrainian company Nibulon swelled the ranks of grain trade organizations playing a significant role in this year's event.

Quality issues dominated the first day of educational sessions. The technical program included Buhler's presentation on "Ultimate Product Safety and Quality," USW'S "King Consistency," and France Export Cereales' discussion about preserving wheat protein in milling. Mycotoxin and MRL legislation, mill fumigations and wheat breeding were covered by

SGS, Insects Ltd. and CWB, respectively.

Al Ghurair Foods presented its research on bread from date fibers and Bakhresa Grain Milling shared its experience in composite bread flour.

The second day included a well-attended trading seminar where the world wheat crop was analyzed by export region. On the final day, nine exhibitors presented their newest products and services during the "What's New?" program.

The 20th annual IAOM Mideast and Africa District Conference will be held near Antalya on Turkey's southern coast Oct. 23-26, 2009. The host organization will be the Turkish Flour Industrialists' Federation, whose chairman, Edip Aktas, presented the venue on the last day of the Arusha program. With 750 operating mills in Turkey and an annual wheat grind exceeding 15 million tonnes, domestic industry participation is expected to balloon the attendance figure.

Most presentations from the Tanzania conference can be found at www.iaom-mea.com. **WG**

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