

## **Record number of 700 participants at Food Forum India 2009**

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The two-day international Food Forum India 2009 (FFI 09) on "Recipes for Success: Live learning from pioneers and leaders" was inaugurated at The Renaissance in Mumbai on March 19. The second edition of FFI 09 was particularly intended for interested foreign investors and manufacturers who are seeking to foray into the Indian market. The event was organised by Mumbai-based Images Group, organisers of IRF (India Retail Forum), one of the biggest retail

tradeshows in India.

Over 700 national and international delegates participated in the convention on day one. In the inaugural session on "Recipes for Success: Surviving the Prevailing Downturn," Kishore Biyani, founder and CEO, Future Group, said, "As the country braves some critical challenges in this unprecedented economic climate, the food industry being the largest consumption category has a special role to play. Consumption will be the key to the progress of financial health of our economy."

Praveen Someshwar, vice-president- bottling operations beverages, PepsiCo, said that rather than brand building one must look for technology upgradation at regular intervals, innovation and methods to reach the customers and navigate the current slowdown in the country. "Despite being of the biggest beverage brands in the country we at PepsiCo always look for expansion and try to reach the customers. It took about 3-4 years to bottle and pack India's traditional soft drink nimbu-paani, marketed as Nimbooz," Someshwar said.

The first day was segregated into six sessions, namely "Food Bites," "Progressive Food Retailers Conclave," "Annual Conclave of National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI)" "Food Space- Open Conclave," "CEOs Meet" and "Coca-Cola Golden Spoon Awards 2009." Speaking in the first session on "The challenges in Farm Fresh Business"

Vinod Sawhny, president & COO, Bharti Retail, said, "We are in the midst of the true beginning of food retailing and value retailing in India. All players are beginning to understand the challenges of the front end and back end. When speak about farm fresh business, cold storages and apt transportation become the main concern in the country."

"The Ministry of Food Processing Industries and FCI (Food Corporation of India) are investing in setting up state-of-the-art cold storages, offering subsidy for small and medium players of the industry and suitably using the current infrastructure. Indian players can also learn a lot from foreign players," Sawhny added.

He suggested small and medium F&B players to invest in contract farming and street food stalls. "Contract farming and meals on wheels are the current buzzwords in the food processing industry. Investors should not only provide financial assistance to farmers but also proper training, equipment, seeds, value, post-harvest technology and proper measures to reduce agri wastage."

The FFI 09 included exhibition in which over 50 national and international manufacturers like PepsiCo, Coca-Cola, Britannia, Cadbury's, Intertek, Future Group, Fritolay and associations like National Restaurants Association of India (NRAI), Global Cold Chain Alliance (GCCA) and others participated.

"Currently, India is at a nascent stage for food quality and safety technology. In the European market, Indian products and Chinese products are treated as same as both are Asian countries. In Europe, hygiene is the priority. Every week, European authorities issue fresh notifications on food imports from these two countries. According to me, Indian producers are far better than the Chinese. Instead of looking at what the competitors (China, Thailand) are doing, the Indian food manufacturers should understand foreign regulations and requirements of food imports which will help them to meet international standards, " Dr Kurt-Peter Raezke, director for testing & analytics, Intertek Food Services GmbH and a speaker for Managing Complexity of Food Quality: International Quality Assurance and Food Safety Benchmarks on March 20 in the event, told Food & Beverage News.

An international observer for session II, Thomas Capune, managing partner for Germany-based CSP Capune, Schaeben & Partner, said that many international brands of small and medium manufacturers from Italy, Germany and France are keen to do business in India with 1.2 billion customers. But stringent laws, poor infrastructure and the unorganised retail sector pose problems for them.

Speaking on the "Scope for premium Food Entry Strategy for Foreign Food brands," K Radhakrishnan, CEO, Reliance Hypermarket, said, "Before importing foreign premium food products we need to develop state-of-the-art technology to preserve them. With changing trends, the Indian customers ask value for their money and we are sure that foreign food products will provide great value." Radhakrishnan shared glimpses of the India Kitchen Audit (IKA) survey. He said, "According to IKA, about 72% Indian homes cook food twice a day by using fresh vegetables. Indian customers prefer fresh cooked food rather than any other preserved food."

The FFI 09 is also supported by the MoFPI and Apeda (Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority)