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# A taste of innovation in food industry

Xin Yun

It used to be inconceivable for freshly cooked meals to last beyond a day, but restaurant chain The Soup Spoon has done it and is changing mindsets across the food manufacturing industry one firm at a time.

The firm adopted high-pressure processing technology – it helps food products stay fresh longer, which means firms have exporting options – with its first machine last November costing about \$2 million.

Not only has it increased the shelf life of soup packs from three weeks to about three months, The Soup Spoon, which has 26 outlets here, has created a range of ready-to-eat meals that can last for 28 days in chilled conditions.

Managing director Andrew Chan told The Straits Times: “We’ve expanded our retail channels locally and most recently, managed to export overseas, to Hong Kong’s premium supermarket.”

Mr Chan was speaking ahead of the Lean Enterprise Development (LED) Symposium to be held on Nov 17, which will highlight the LED scheme and encourage small and medium-sized enterprises to drive business growth through the adoption of technology and manpower-lean initiatives. The scheme was introduced in October 2015.

The Soup Spoon also opened its high-pressure processing facility for food and beverage industry practitioners in January, said to be the first in Singapore. Mr Chan said: “The response has been positive, and we’ve received many requests from many firms to use our technology on the products.”

“Currently we are waiting for approval for the usage, but we have assisted in many research and development (R&D) efforts for our partner companies.”

The Soup Spoon’s efforts in educating the industry about the technology and increasing productivity are part of a multi-agency effort involving Workforce Singapore (WSG),



Mr Andrew Chan, managing director of The Soup Spoon, said: “There is really nothing to hide or keep secret when it comes to technical know-how in today’s world, where everything can be found on the Internet.” ST PHOTO: CHEW SENG KIM

Spring Singapore and Singapore Polytechnic, that began in March last year. Mr Chan said its facility has “helped many firms overcome issues like short shelf life as well as to maintain the taste and texture of products without the need for pasteurisation or adding preservatives”.

This LED project, supported by WSG, has led to food companies such as TGGC, Golden Bridge, The Seafood Company and Joe & Dough exploring new ways to extend shelf life for existing products, and tap R&D for opportunities in expanding product range. The Soup Spoon, for instance, has saved manpower and resources with the product development time cut by 50 per cent, and reduced employee overtime hours.

Mr Chan said the firm’s main challenge when adopting high-pressure processing technology was tweaking the recipes and finding out what food items worked in the process, but the long-term results meant the R&D has paid off.

The Soup Spoon’s experience also encourages other firms that visit its facility to innovate. Mr Chan noted it was more the lack of education about high-pressure processing technology, rather than resistance to it.

“Many could not believe that a freshly cooked meal can last 28 days in chilled conditions, without adding preservatives. I believe many were reassured by the fact that they tasted and ate the ready-to-eat meals themselves, and could not tell the difference



between the freshly cooked and ready-to-eat versions.”

Mr Chan is heartened to see the “growing acceptance” of sharing equipment, resources, technical know-how and network. “We have hosted many visits to our facility to introduce the technology to

interested parties. There is really nothing to hide or keep secret when it comes to technical know-how in today’s world, where everything can be found on the Internet,” he said.

**Brought to you by LED Taskforce.**

## LEAN ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT (LED) SCHEME

The LED Scheme aims to help SMEs transform and grow so that we can achieve the following outcomes:

### MORE MANPOWER-LEAN



Improved processes or business models which would use less manpower and reduce reliance on foreign manpower

### STRONGER SINGAPOREAN CORE



Create better jobs, pay and careers for Singaporeans after restructuring

### HIGHER QUALITY WORKFORCE



A workforce that is more skilled and possesses higher expertise

Source: MINISTRY OF MANPOWER

The Soup Spoon has increased the shelf life of soup packs from three weeks to about three months. PHOTO: THE SOUP SPOON



### LED SYMPOSIUM 2017

Find out how you can benefit from the LED Scheme at the LED Symposium 2017, on Nov 17.

Themed “Transform and Grow – Towards Lean Industries”, it is a platform for small and medium-sized enterprises to learn from success stories and to drive growth by adopting technology and manpower-lean initiatives.

Register now at [www.mom.gov.sg/leds](http://www.mom.gov.sg/leds). Admission is free.