

StarSpecial

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EXPORT EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2022

Leading Malaysian export to greater heights

Through perseverance and resilience, the country's leading exporters emerge triumphant at the third edition of the Export Excellence Awards, despite economic uncertainties and disruptive challenges.



Award winners with (back row, from second left) Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (Matrade) chief executive officer (CEO) Datuk Mohd Mustafa Abdul Aziz and Star Media Group (SMG) group CEO Alex Yeow, with SMG chairman Tan Sri Chor Chee Heung (fifth from left) and International Trade and Industry Ministry (Miti) secretary-general Datuk Seri Lokman Hakim Ali (seventh from left), alongside (from ninth left) Standard Chartered Bank Malaysia Chairman Datuk Yvonne Chia and CEO Mak Joon Nien, as well as PKT Logistics Group chief marketing officer Kuan Eu Jin (twelfth from left) at the Export Excellence Awards 2022 Gala Night at M Resort and Hotel Kuala Lumpur.

Sustainability through renewable materials

WITH the global focus turning towards sustainability, owing to environmental, social and governance concerns, global oleochemical producer KLK Oleo is certainly well positioned to tap into the increasing demand for renewable materials.

KLK OLEO, the manufacturing division of Kuala Lumpur Kepong Berhad (KLK) with integrated oleochemical complexes located in key sourcing and supply markets across Malaysia, Indonesia, China and Europe, is a leading international plantations group listed on the Main Market of Bursa Malaysia Securities Bhd.

It produces a wide range of high-quality sustainable oleochemical products from natural renewable raw materials, ranging from basic oleochemical products – such as fatty acids, glycerine, fatty alcohols and fatty esters – to specialties like methyl ester sulphonates (MES), surfactants and phytonutrients.

The company's products are utilised in diverse end-use applications, including home and personal healthcare, cosmetics and toiletries, food, flavours and fragrances, lubricants, polymers and industrial chemicals.

Most recently, it won the Thriving in Adversity award under the Export Excellence Awards (EEA) 2022.

According to KLK chief operating officer Lee Jia Zhang, the company is thrilled to win the award, as it honours its efforts and tremendous resilience against the global headwinds and evolving demands during the Covid-19 crisis.

"This acknowledgement has given us a monumental boost and a great sense of pride to continue excelling and leaving our mark in the Malaysian local manufacturing industry.

"It is definitely the people (KLK Oleo team) that contributed to the success of winning this award. Their hard work and commitment have made all the difference and kept the company resilient.

"Everyone interweaved in great unison and performed admirably amid the volatile



The company is thrilled with winning the Thriving in Adversity award, said Lee.

Covid-19 pandemic. Together, we undertook monumental steps to not only sustain but to emerge as a more robust partner to our customers during these trying times," he shared.

During the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, KLK Oleo as an approved essential industry, sustained efforts to maintain operations on units of demand, without compromising the health and wellbeing of the people, which it sees as an invaluable asset.

It clustered as a unified team, exercising multiple controls in curbing the spread of Covid-19, while operating on key areas of demand. A Covid-19 task force comprising senior management, working closely with its people, was formed across all its sites.

In anticipation of the global recession and forthcoming economic challenges that the company could face in the coming year, its manufacturing and business units have already begun multiplying efforts in the area of market diversification, new customer market exploration and sales optimisation.

Lee shared that the company's sales and marketing teams have been busy venturing



KLK Oleo deputy CEO Siew Fook Ming (holding award) with his team at the Export Excellence Awards 2022 Gala Night. – YAP CHEE HONG/ The Star

into new markets across the Asian and European market to further expand its customer reach and product demand.

"In addition, our core manufacturing units shall continue to operate in a safe, sustainable and optimum level to continue enjoying uninterrupted supply of key products.

"Besides that, several of our new manufacturing projects, namely in Malaysia, Indonesia, China and Europe are expected to be commissioned and begin early production in the coming one to two years. This will also boost our product variation and supply chain in the oleo industry and market outreach to a greater circle of customers," he added.

On the award win, Lee said that it will "definitely prove as a catalyst" for the company to continue excelling in the Malaysian palm oil and oleochemical industry.

He said, "We have been acknowledged for our hard work, perseverance and dedication to remain strong and prevalent, but we will not stop striving to better ourselves.

"We will continue to motivate and inspire our people to double their efforts in order to achieve and surpass those targets set and for sure awards such as this and the recognition given by fellow Malaysian manufacturing

and economic peers goes a long way in raising our spirits and enthusiasm."

Lee shared the company's 'thrilling and fulfilling' journey resulting from its experience in participating and winning a key award in this year's EEA, adding there was added value in being able to network and exchange great ideas and thoughts among the Malaysian manufacturing and industrial community.

For companies seeking to participate in future editions of the EEA, he encouraged companies, especially those budding to scale greater heights in the future, to participate in the EEA award in the coming years.

He further said, "I was informed by my team that the submission to this award includes a wide spectrum of production, sustainability, sales and marketing.

"This can give your organisation a great opportunity to see where you currently stand from end to end towards your overall performance and achievement, whilst proving a golden opportunity for your different teams to come together as one, further fostering great teamwork and unity! So, yes – to all the companies out there yet to register your interest EEA, you should not wait any longer!"

THE winner for the newly-introduced Rising Star category in the Export Excellence Awards 2022, Nata Food Manufacturing Sdn Bhd, is ready to take the next step forward in its journey towards success.

The company started as a mother-son initiative, solely because of nata de coco's health benefits and a vision to explore nata de coco's applications beyond food, said its managing director Loh Kin Hoo.

Today, the business operates in both the business-to-business (B2B) as well as business-to-consumer (B2C) sectors, with its clientele comprising mainly businesses in the foods and beverages industry, as well as manufacturers of beauty and packaging products.

"As the world has a rising desire for natural and nutritious food products, our intentions and the world's demand successfully align, nurturing the future generation to practise increased mindfulness in their dietary choices," he explained.

Nata de coco is an ideal substitute for tapioca pearls, as it is reportedly 70% lower in calories compared to the latter, without compromising the tasting and chewing satisfactory experience – with an added benefit of containing immune-boosting vitamins B and C.

Despite its success thus far, Nata Food Manufacturing has faced down its share of challenges. Among the main issues faced during the pandemic, for example, was the worldwide lockdown that badly impacted its sales and income.

In addition, there was also the issue of sustaining and ensuring that workers have a job and salary despite low productivity and demand. Instead of laying off workers or shutting down production, however, Nata Food Manufacturing rose to the occasion by taking the road typically not taken.

The company decided to renegotiate with its suppliers for a special bulk purchase discount and it was this win-win situation that helped lower costs and continue 'jobs' for its employees, as well as helping build relationships and support for its suppliers during the tough period.

"Nevertheless our end goal is, when the market reopens we are the first to be there

Promoting healthy, nutritious food



Nata Food Manufacturing's Loh (centre, holding award) and his team during the Export Excellence Awards 2022 Gala Night at M Resort and Hotel, Kuala Lumpur. – YAP CHEE HONG/ The Star

and ready to supply to the market," he said on Nata Food Manufacturing's determination.

On the company's growth strategy for the upcoming years, he shared that Nata Food Manufacturing will continue to explore the versatility of nata de coco as a form of raw material beyond the food market.

"In recent years, a breakthrough discovery proved that this conventional ingredient has multiple applications outside of the food and beverage industry. The nata de coco we supply to our clients are directly and indirectly exported as a form of finished product, both by us and our clients as well.

"Discovering beauty masks and packaging materials manufactured out of nata de coco created a new streamline of opportunity to capitalise on the multi-billion-dollar industry

for nata de coco products," he said.

It is for this reason that the company is confident that nata de coco can essentially be further utilised with the increasing demand for health-conscious living, as well as an effort to improve environmental conditions.

In accepting the award, Loh was sure to thank his team, saying, "Kudos to the team who carried out the initiatives and plans persistently during the pandemic period. Being a new startup that focuses on a new and niche market, it takes a lot of hard work and perseverance to pull through those tough times. There's a saying that tough times don't last, tough people do!"

"I'm proud and overjoyed to be recognised and be part of this important event. I'm also glad and honored to be sharing the same

stage with so many top CEOs that have contributed greatly to the nation's growth.

"This award served as a quick 'pit stop' for us to celebrate and appreciate the hard work and perseverance we've put in throughout the journey. I believe this award will give us courage and confidence to push us through to the next level. After all, success isn't final, failure isn't fatal. It's the courage to continue that matters.

To other exporters seeking to grow, Loh's advice is to benchmark against the nation's top exporters and peers in the industry, while building a brand.

"My advice will be do not hesitate to try, despite how 'big or small' your company can be. I think this is a great platform to put your branding out there, as well as to test yourself with many captains of the industry," he said.