



Quality, Efficiency Take Food Processor to New Heights

Edmonton-based Siwin Foods is running on all cylinders, thanks to a new facility, quality-minded people and its Growing Forward 2 projects.

The food processing sector is one of the most fiercely competitive parts of the economy, with companies fighting it out for a share of retailers' shelves and consumers' budgets.

Despite intense competition, there's tremendous upside for companies that can hit the sweet spot -- providing a high-quality food product that's in demand and competitively priced.

Three years ago, food processor Siwin Foods opened its custom-built, state-of-the-art production facility in Edmonton. The facility was designed with employee comfort, production efficiency and food safety as top priorities.

According to Vice President Gord DeJong, the company's been running flat-out ever since. Sales have nearly doubled over the past year, and stronger revenue has driven employment higher.

"When we moved into the new building, we had 12 employees," DeJong says. "Today we're up to 65 employees and we're hiring regularly."

Product excellence opens doors

Siwin Foods makes a variety of products, including sausages, stir-fry dishes and Asian-inspired dumplings. Its Chinese-style dumplings can be boiled or pan-fried (called a potsticker). Siwin also make Japanese-style dumplings, known as gyozas.

"What really makes our product special is the flavour and the dough wrapper," says DeJong. "Our product is more tender and has a better texture."

Recently, Siwin's dumplings were picked up by Costco Canada nationally, sweeping aside an incumbent U.S.-based supplier. Retailers across Western Canada carry Siwin dumplings and the company aims to expand to other grocery chains in Eastern Canada. Siwin has also recently begun to ship sausage products into Japan and, longer term, wants to sell its gyozas there as well.

As DeJong explains, one driver of Siwin's success has been a close working relationship with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry. Beginning in 2007, the company took its initial steps in product development within the walls of the Food Processing Development Centre in Leduc.

Over the years, Siwin Foods has participated in multiple *Growing Forward 2* programs, including the Agri-Processing Product and Market Development Program and the Agri-Processing Automation and Efficiency program. These cost-sharing programs helped Siwin purchase



specialized equipment, develop products, find markets and implement best practices throughout the operation.

“What makes our facility stand out is the efficiencies in product flow, people flow, as well as energy efficiency and food safety,” says DeJong. “It’s quite a green building.”

DeJong points to one plant design feature in particular: the facility has no horizontal water pipes, ducting or refrigeration lines in the production area. Dust and dirt have no place to land, which keeps the plant cleaner and advances the goal of food safety.

Alberta Sourced Ingredients

As Siwin Foods has expanded, it has caused a ripple effect for other Alberta businesses. DeJong emphasizes that Siwin sources all its ingredients locally, with meat from Alberta processing plants, flour from a mill in Calgary and vegetables from an Edmonton-based company.

“I believe our plant has provided a great advantage not only for Siwin Foods and the employment we’ve created, but also for other organizations surrounding us,” he says.

After just three years in its new facility, Siwin is already nearing maximum capacity in some areas of the operation, and plans to add new products. Things are looking up.

“I see a future of increasing sales and hiring more people,” DeJong notes. “The *Growing Forward 2* programs have been a tremendous help. Growing Forward helped us get into Japan and expand into Eastern Canada. It has been a very powerful tool.”

Growing Forward 2 is a federal – provincial – territorial initiative.