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“We need incentives like cheaper credit for the agri-financing intermediaries like Agri NBFCs”

SANDEEP SABHARWAL,

Group CEO, Sohan Lal Commodity Management (SLCM)

*Founded in 2009, Sohan Lal Commodity Management Pvt. Ltd. (SLCM) Group is one of India's leading comprehensive service providers in the global post-harvest space for agricultural commodities. It currently operates a network of over 10,255 warehouses and has disbursed loans worth more than Rs 2600 crore over the last three years through its wholly-owned subsidiary Kissandhan business unit. It recently received the accreditation from the National Accreditation Board for Testing & Calibration Laboratories (NABL) for its ground-breaking AI ML QC application, which falls under its patented process management system, “Agri Reach”. This marks the first time in NABL's history that a mobile app has received certification. Sandeep Sabharwal, Group CEO of SLCM, spoke with AgroSpectrum about the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the agri supply chain industry in India. **Edited excerpts;***

How do you perceive the transformation of the agriculture value chain with the adoption of new technology solutions?

We have come a long way in the agriculture sector since independence. Over the past two decades the agriculture sector has experienced major disruptions with the introduction of innovative products and solutions that utilise new-age technology applications. Embracing new-age technology platforms or a combination of them like AI, Machine Learning (ML), Internet of Things (IoT), Blockchain, RFIDs, Edge, Drones, etc., is the key to improving efficiencies and optimising operations while reducing costs. The deployment of these new-age technology applications has paved the way for new service models such as ‘Farm-To-Fork’, ‘Farming-as-a-Service (FaaS)’, etc.

How is SLCM's AI-based Quality Check mobile App ‘Agri Reach’ helping farmers and traders get better prices for their products?

Using this AI ML QC module smartphone application to conduct a quality check of



agricultural products is as simple as taking a picture. A simple click and submission through the app will analyse the image for a variety of quality metrics. The user will then receive a detailed quality report based on evidence in the photograph, that covers specifications such as damaged, shrunken, shrivelled or immature grains, foreign matter and a host of other physical parameters like height, length, grid, colour and pattern of the commodity. The results

are compared with pre-fed data in the back-end system, which updates itself regularly using a combination of technologies including AI and ML with Python programming language.

The quality check mobile app currently covers wheat, guar, soya beans, chana, rice and maize. It enables farmers, agri traders, and arhtiyas to get an 'on-the-spot assessment' of the commodity's sample within minutes, without having to use any equipment or lab tests. In just two months since its launch, the mobile app has been used to inspect 21.59 lakh metric tonnes of crops at 303 locations in 17 states. The app helps farmers and traders get better prices for their products by providing objective quality reports, which helps them negotiate a fair price in the market.

Recently, the company has received NABL accreditation for the QC App, how will this help in the adoption of 'Agri Reach' by farmers and traders, etc.?

We had the vision for 'phygitalising' (physical + digital infrastructure) the warehouse management system over a decade ago. With a dedicated team of professionals, SLCM created 'Agri Reach' – a system that enables effective warehousing solutions agnostic of infrastructure, geography, and crops. We are the only company in the Indian agriculture sector that has registered a technology patent in the Agri-Logistics (warehousing) segment spanning 75 years post-Independence. And now I am proud to state that the company has reinforced its leadership status by being the first and only company in this space to receive the coveted NABL accreditation for an app that will transform the way the agri industry assesses the quality of its commodities. It is a matter of credibility which will reinforce the trust among end-users.

What transformations have you observed in the post-harvest industry in India in the last five years?

'Phygitalisation' which means the digital imperative to reinforce the supply chain and logistics infrastructure by bridging the gap between digital offerings and physical space is one of the most important steps in the right direction.

The agri-warehousing and cold-storage industries in India are at a point of inflexion. It is imperative that the industry be viewed as a facilitator that aggregates the various supply chain services. This will not only serve the entire agriculture community but also improve transparency and efficiency by incorporating the best scientific methods to optimise the physical movement of crops. To foster growth in the industry, we need incentives such as cheaper credit for the agri-financing intermediaries like Agri Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) and practical dispute resolution forums to address the nuances of agriculture and its related issues.

Tell us about the company's business plans to deepen its reach in the APAC region in the years to come.

In the APAC region, apart from India, we are already present in Myanmar since 2014. Currently, we are in talks with countries like Cambodia and Vietnam and exploring some of the African nations through various B2B collaborative forums. Everything depends on the policy and business environment and the moment we feel that the time is right, we will venture out to expand our footprint.

What inputs are required for the growth of the agri-warehousing and cold storage industries in India?

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