

ENABLING DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS

Food and beverage manufacturing organisations wish to move toward real-time, data-driven, and intelligent operations, but are often constrained by fragmented systems, inconsistent data, and limited process maturity.

A recent DAC Systems, First Distribution and Microsoft roundtable brought together food and beverage manufacturing executives to discuss operational challenges, transformation priorities, the evolving role of data and AI and a strong, shared interest in embracing analytics. It also displayed recognition that foundational capabilities such as data quality, governance, and process discipline must be established first.

"The discussion highlighted shared pressures, pain points and opportunities, as businesses look to modernise operations and improve performance," says DAC Systems' CEO, Chris Willemse.

"The roundtable explored a lack of unified, real-time view across this sector's operations – from production and inventory to cost management and compliance, to enable value-chain control and responsiveness. Disconnected data and older, disparate platforms limit visibility and compromise awareness and decision-making."

Willemse says the roundtable discussed the need for greater flexibility and insight into increasingly complex inventory and stock management – especially in high-volume environments. In the food and beverage sector, which represents approximately one fifth of the country's manufacturing output, there is escalating pressure to understand cost impact, improve operational efficiency, and reduce waste – all towards greater competitive advantage.

"Managing production costs, establishing accurate inventory levels and values, and pricing in real-time are all significant challenges, particularly in environments with tight margins and frequent price adjustments," says Willemse. "Without precise, timely cost visibility, organisations struggle to maintain profitability and effectively respond to market changes."

He adds that technology should provide the required integrated financial and operational view that helps the food and beverage manufacturing decision makers with better cost control, commercial decision-making and ROI comprehension.

"Focus should entail turning information into actionable intelligence. Many food and beverage manufacturers recognise limitations in data quality, integration, accessibility and governance and the requirement of a solid foundation of all these aspects. However, mid-market to smaller enterprises in this sector are



Chris Willemse, CEO, DAC Systems

not all running on the latest and greatest technology – the latter potentially affording an enablement and multiplier effect. Digital maturity will separate the leaders from the laggards, but this maturity requires investment."

This sector has its own unique pressures. Consumers and markets demand that organisations respond quickly to opportunities, possess speed-to-market and have agile operations. Considering the impact of the cold chain and seasonal purchasing patterns, there are expectations of consistent quality, safety, traceability, auditability and compliance – all non-negotiables across the entire value chain. These are critical requirements, particularly in regulated environments.

Balancing local with exports

"There remains a strong call for support of local industries, involving greater brand visibility and promotion of locally produced goods. Organisations must balance local market positioning alongside global competitiveness. Today's socio and geopolitical sentiments and external market conditions impact on export demand, adding pressure for this sector to respond to volatility."

Food and beverage ecosystems are highly strategic, and organisations are increasingly dependent on extended supplier and distribution networks. Willemse says improved collaboration is required to manage risk, efficiency, and continuity across the value chain.

"Skills retention, knowledge transfer and structured capability development are also under pressure. These challenges must be addressed to mitigate the impact on operational continuity. Skills and capabilities should be able to support investments."

DAC Systems enables manufacturers to unify financial and operational data through Microsoft Dynamics 365. It establishes trusted technology foundations, operational visibility and integrated, platform-enabled partnership models that support end-to-end execution. This allows manufacturers to focus on their core business, delivering real-time visibility from production to profitability.

"Organisations in this sector can become connected, intelligent, and continuously improve their competitive advantage," concludes Willemse. ■