

# Regulations, Sustainable Agriculture and Industry Collaboration

## Highlights from the 11th World Spice Congress, Pune, India

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The biannual World Spice Congress has grown every year on a platform of business, leisure and new learning, becoming the single most important event in the spice industry. Co-hosted by the Spices Board, the premier government body responsible for Indian spice exports, and the All India Spices Exporters Forum, an industry-constituted organization representing the spice exporters in the country, this year's event featured 500 delegates from more than 50 countries, uniting farmers, ingredient manufacturers, food processors, equipment manufacturers, scientists, regulators and government representatives.



*The World Spice Congress offered a chance to celebrate and discuss the industry's challenges and opportunities.*

### Food Safety and Sustainability—Global Initiatives

Food safety and sustainability formed the theme of the congress, providing an opportunity to deliberate on the future of the industry. Tomorrow, delegates noted, routine buying and selling might not be sufficient. Rising demand, coupled with a dearth of spices that meet regulatory and quality standards, will soon be a common industry paradox. For now, agriculture, supply chains and the environment are not geared to meet these new challenges.

Calls for help can already be seen in the industry: decreasing productivity, rising costs of production, increased numbers of product rejections, confusing and disharmonized regulations, and so on. The congress discussions highlighted the anomalies of food safety policies, while also strategizing across the supply chain to ensure food safety. The deliberations were represented by different industry stakeholders: regulators, major buyers, exporters, farmers and sustainability enthusiasts.

Three points that received the most attention at the event were:

**Regulations—their fairness and practicality, and the need for harmonization:** Regulations are often constituted without considering the practical implementation possibilities at the regions of cultivation, delegates

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said. The risk assessment and, therefore, the setting of maximum residue levels are not done based on scientific parameters like the quantum of consumption (at least not in all countries). The panelists unanimously echoed the need to simplify regulations, bring in commonality of standards and enable information flow. A regulator representative commented that events like the congress help regulators understand the supply chain the regulations are made for and that it then becomes necessary to work with all the stakeholders in the industry to successfully remove a problem chemical or a microbe from the food chain.

**Back to the roots:** Many discussions on different industry challenges came to rest on the realization that spice industry needs to turn to its farms and growing regions, from promoting sustainable agricultural practices to ensuring that research reaches the farm.



Technical experts and regulatory representatives from the US Food and Drug Administration, Canada and Japan discussed contaminants and global harmonization of standards.



A. Jayathilak, center, chairman of the Spices Board, inaugurated the 2012 World Spice Congress, accompanied by Geemon Korah, at right, chairman of the All India Spices Exporters Forum.



Attendees toasted the spice industry.

In this context, a novel project spearheaded by the World Spice Organisation (WSO)—a nonprofit arm of the Spices Board of India (a private-public partnership)—which involves a backward integration model that connects exporters, processors, farmers, state governments, scientists and regulatory officials—received tremendous encouragement.

WSO is conducting the pilot of this model this year with chili on 2,000 acres, involving around 1,000 farmers and eight processors/exporters. The area was selected because it is not a traditional chili-growing area; therefore, it features pesticide-free soils and fresh minds.

**Collaboration:** The congress reinforced the importance of stakeholder-wide involvement and collaboration for sustainability, requiring constant dialogue and concerted efforts. The “coalition of the willing,” as described by Margriet Glazenborg of IDH Sustainable Trade Initiative, sums up the need to work together to face the challenges in the industry.

Amid the heady discussions and serious realizations, delegates also found time for fun. Dinner parties and cultural programs that showcased Indian dance and music



A view of the exhibition; pictured Suhana Spices

stole the show. The 2012 WSC ended with the chairmen of the congress, A. Jayathilak of the Spices Board, and Geemon Korah of All India Spices Exporters Forum, promising to keep the flame burning—a task force will be formed to take action on the congress deliberations and review the progress, periodically.

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