



Biz Beat: Global Food Technologies™ vision living up to name

By Seth Nidever

snidever@HanfordSentinel.com



There is a business in Hanford called Global Food Technologies that is seeking to be just that -- global. Keith Meeks, CEO of the company that wants to sell anti-food contamination technology to overseas producers, may have grown up in Hanford, but his vision extends to Chile, Vietnam, China and beyond.

Ultimately, that vision is to import food processed overseas back into the U.S. to consumers growing increasingly concerned about food safety.

With much of the food consumed in the U.S. coming from abroad, there is a potentially huge market for GFT's technology.

At the company headquarters inside the Old Courthouse building, maps of the world line the walls. Three clocks tell the time in London, England; Santiago, Chile; and Beijing, China.

"I always knew this was going to be big," Meeks said.

The company came to Hanford earlier this year with a lot of fanfare and a lot of promise

Tuesday, Meeks said the company is on the verge of bringing in revenue for the first time since it began in 2001.

The business is negotiating agreements with food processing plants in Chile, Vietnam and China to install its antibacterial food processing system, called iPura

The system works by dunking food under pressure in a liquid antibacterial chemical, then packaging it in an antiseptic room at specific temperatures, according to Aaron Ormond, director of science for the company.

The company is currently testing its equipment at the old Pirelli tire plant in Hanford's industrial park, Meeks said.

Plans are to build a laboratory facility there and a prototype testing chamber. The food purification equipment itself will be outsourced to vendors, he said.

The company is developing a technique approved by the FDA for use on seafood, but claims that it is also applicable to food items like poultry and beef.

Though the price of renting the old Pirelli facility looked good to Meeks, he said the main reason for locating the company headquarters in Hanford (it has sales offices overseas and other offices in Los Altos and Newport Beach), was because he got tired of traveling to the company's research and development facility in Pocatello, Idaho

That facility has been transferred to the old Pirelli plant, Meeks said.

If the company ends up selling its equipment to the major overseas food processors it's now in negotiations with, it could become the industry standard, said David Weinstein, managing partner of a Florida-based financial firm that is looking at GFT as a possible investment opportunity.

"It's the first time I've seen a U.S. company which allows countries outside the U.S. to import back into the United States," Weinstein said.

Weinstein said he's watching closely to see if GFT can "execute the first part of the business plan."

"What I'm actually waiting for is for them to consummate some of the commercial contracts," he said.

It's been a long and painstaking progress toward that goal for the 25-employee firm.

The past several years have been consumed with testing and retesting the equipment over and over, with thousands of studies being conducted in cooperation with Idaho State University.

"It's similar to a pharmaceutical company trying to bring a drug to market," Meeks said.

Meeks started off as an investor in the company, but gradually took on more and more responsibilities with it that took him further and further away from his job as a certified financial planner. Eventually, he quit that job, and moved to GFT full time as company CEO.

"I never knew it would take this much work," he said.

Current company plans call for earning revenue from service contracts by the end of the year and going public on the American stock exchange, Meeks said.

"We're pretty much under wraps. We're sneaking up on the world," Meeks said.

If the company lives up to its promise, that will all change in a hurry.

"If they're successful at it, in 10 years Global Food Technologies could be the nomenclature for bacteria-safe food," said Weinstein.

The reporter can be reached at 583-2432.

(July 25, 2008)