

Givrex: Synonymous with High Quality In Vegetables, Fruits for Two Generations

Alexandria-based company, now entering its 33rd year in business, boosts production at second factory. Steadfast at the helm is Robert Mansour, founder and president.

One day, when the definitive history of Egypt's frozen food industry is written, the trials, tribulations and triumphs of Robert G. Mansour will be chronicled in great detail within the first chapter of the book. A genuine pioneer who showed the way and paved the road for others to follow his lead in the processed vegetable and fruit business, his commercial roots also lie in the marine products sector.

"As a young man I seized an opportunity in the seafood industry, specializing in the export of frozen shrimp to markets in Europe and elsewhere," the now 80-year-old founder and president of Alexandria-headquartered Givrex told *Quick Frozen Foods International* magazine.

"In those days the Mediterranean waters off the coast of Egypt were rich in resources. Landings were plentiful, with six to eight tons of shrimp coming into port each day."

Unintended human events turned the tide against the flourishing trade, however, as the rise of the Aswan High Dam precipitated the decline of the shrimp business. Its monumental construction reduced the natural flow of the Nile River's stream of rich nutrients into the sea by an estimated 50% or more. This led to a large drop in growth of phytoplankton, the primary food source for fish and shrimp. The effect was catastrophic, with shrimp fishery yields plummeting dramatically.



Beans move on down the Cabinplant line installed at the new Givrex processing plant in Alexandria.

This was a big setback, along with the fact that the government nationalized Mr. Mansour's company twice – first in 1961, and again in 1963. But there were other places to get shrimp.

Having established a solid export clientele, but lacking product to sell, the entrepreneur packed his bags and headed to the West African nation of Senegal to procure raw materials from the Atlantic Ocean. His efforts were successful enough, but with a wife and child still in Alexandria, it was not long before family ties brought him home again.

Full of can-do spirit and enthusiasm, he was eager to find a way to get into the frozen vegetable business. Patience and determination paid off in spades, as his focus on developing contacts with farmers in the fertile green fields of the Nile Delta to supply an upstart processing plant led to the ultimate establishment of the Givrex brand in 1978.

"We began small, mainly producing green beans, carrots, spinach and artichokes. Givrex soon became the first Egyptian company to export frozen artichokes, shipping quantities to Canada," recalled the president.

While day-to-day management of the family business is now in the capable hands of a second generation, the founder very much remains the helmsman, having successfully dealt with health issues in the past year. Daughter Monique serves as financial controller, while sons Patrick and Eric, respectively, head up the production/operations and sales/marketing departments.

The company's vegetable product assortment is wide, ranging from 10 kinds of artichokes (including bottoms, hearts, quarters and cups for stuffing) to okra, spinach, broccoli, cauliflower, sweet corn, grilled egg-



Robert Mansour (seated), Egyptian frozen food pioneer and founder of Givrex, is seen at headquarters in Alexandria with key members of his family-run company (left to right): son Eric, daughter Monique and son Patrick.

plant, green beans, peeled broad beans, peas, sweet potatoes, falafel paste, lentil cream for soups, vegetables for stuffing, and more.

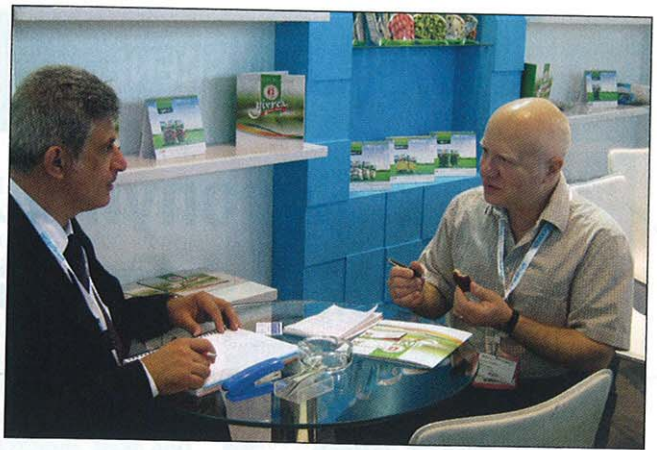
Its fruit portfolio, also extensive, includes high-brix souzana and festival strawberries, pulp and IQF guava, mango, peach and apricot, plus red fig quarters and Zaghoul variety dates.

The company's second factory, which geared up in earnest last year after test runs in late 2009, is a state-of-the-art facility containing 49 meters of production line outfitted with blanching, pre-cooling, cooling, dewatering vibration and other equipment made by Cabinplant A/S of Denmark. For freezing, it has installed a track conveyor belt system supplied from Sweden by JBT FoodTech.

"Today we are producing about 24 tons of frozen vegetables per line over a 16-hour period, with output of green beans amounting to 17 tons and broccoli accounting for the remainder," Eric Mansour informed this writer during a recent tour of the plant.

When artichoke season is in full swing, from February through March or April, the company will be running around the clock to pack an average of 25 tons per day in both factories.

"Givrex is fully prepared to meet the demand of our customers, many of whom are major supermarket chains as well as foodservice operators and retail brand distributors in Europe," said the sales and marketing director. "We also export to North America, Australia, China and countries in the Middle East, as well as supplying the home market."



Patrick Mansour (left) of Givrex tells Peter Joannides all about the frozen vegetable and fruit producer's product line during the Foodgate/Freshgate Egypt business-to-business gathering in Sharm-El-Sheikh, held in late November. Joannides is a buyer with John & Pascalis Limited, a London-based importer and distributor.

At the moment, more than 90% of production is shipped abroad. In the future, Givrex expects to significantly increase volume sales domestically, where it has long been a brand leader in the highly populated Cairo and Alexandria markets.

"We anticipate a lot of potential for expansion of the convenience frozen food sector in Egypt, and intend to supply a good portion of that market," figures Robert Mansour. — Reported by John M. Saulnier

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