

Sabinsa's founder maintains commitment to quality has driven explosive growth



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Sami Labs' facility in Nelamangala houses dedicated probiotic production facilities as well as a supercritical CO2 extraction installation.

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During a press tour of its Indian operations, Sabinsa Corp founder Dr Muhammed Majeed detailed how the company has grown from a basement operation decades ago in New Jersey to a firm that has offices or operations around the globe.

This past week several journalists toured the production facilities and growing operations of Sabinsa's Indian subsidiary Sami Labs in a press trip that was paid for by the company. The company is now based in Bengaluru, in southern India. In that country it has industrial facilities in and around Bengaluru as well as Hyderabad; and contract farming agreements with growers in Tamil Nadu state as well as elsewhere in India. Sabinsa has also expanded its growing operations to other countries as well.

Majeed emphasized that the growth of the company has been founded on backing the science behind the ingredients. In his view, that was not true when he started into the dietary supplement ingredient supply business, first with a form of niacin. In those days, Majeed said, few companies had much in the way of data to support the action of their ingredients.

Majeed said he also had a vision of a vertically integrated company. Only by controlling the production process could new and innovative ingredients be efficiently brought to market, he said. Majeed's son, Shaheen Majeed, the company's marketing director, said those capabilities figure into the company's shift in strategic direction toward producing more finished formulas for customers.

Bengaluru's explosive growth

Sabinsa's main offices are in an industrial area of Bengaluru itself. The facility, which originally was intended as a high tech factory but never came to full fruition, houses corporate offices and the company's extensive quality control labs and research & development facilities. Journalists also toured the company's manufacturing facilities in Nelamangala, Kunigal and Dobaspet on the outskirts of the metropolitan area.

The company's main facility is situated in a development block called the Peenya Industrial Area, a location that has been swallowed by Bengaluru's explosive growth. It's a city that in its humming vitality and undercurrent of chaos bubbling close to the surface gives the impression of a place that's booming and falling into ruin at the same time. Dealing with that growth and its consequences has been a challenge for Sabinsa and other similar industrial concerns in the area. As Bengaluru's and nation's economy scaled up, more and more Indians could afford cars, but the road network has not come close to keeping pace with that growth. The roads are jammed full of a weaving mass of all manner of vehicles, from squadrons of scooters, to three wheeled vehicles packed with people and goods, to heavily laden trucks, to a plethora of passenger sedans, all honking their horns like flocks of geese on migration.

"When we first built out here, only a few cars would come by on the road," Dr Majeed said.

But dealing with traffic congestion that arises from economic growth is, all things considered, a good problem to have. Sami Labs perseveres by shuttling material from its several facilities that include batch processing and supercritical CO₂ fluid extraction in Kunigal to a continuous flow extraction process in Dobaspet.

Quality control and R&D



Solvent tower at Sami Lab's Kunigal facility.

At the mothership in Peenya, Sami Labs houses its extensive quality control operations. The company has invested heavily in analytical equipment, including a variety of mass spectrometry instruments and liquid chromatography analyzers. The facility also houses a full fledged pilot plant. More than a dozen HPLC's and similar analytical equipment support to the core research group. The R&D facility is also equipped with medium pressure LC's and preparative HPLC's for isolation of bioactive molecules. Sami Labs has even recently installed its own dedicated NMR machine.

Dr Majeed said the extensive analytical suite was necessary to ensure quality products across the board.

"I wanted to build the best company in the business and that can only be based on research," he said.

Shaheen Majeed said the company's research facilities play and pilot project capabilities play well into the firm's developing strategic direction: to act more as a formulation partner and less as a straight ingredient supplier.

"Customers look at things we have done and they say, I want to do that with other ingredients," he said.

Examples of new products arising from that pipeline include chewable curcumin and probiotics in gummy form and as chews.

Curcumin sales

Speaking of products, Sabinsa has too long a list to detail here. But the big sellers at the moment are Lactospore, the company's *Bacillus coagulans* spore-forming strain produced at its dedicated facility in Nelamangala, and, among botanicals, curcumin in the form of C3 Complex, C3 Reduct, and other forms, which



Curcumin extract at one stage of processing.

are produced at Kunigal and Dobaspet. Another big seller has been Bioperine, the company's proprietary black pepper extract that has bioavailability boosting properties.

Sales for the C3 Complex (which includes three forms of curcuminoids found in the turmeric root) and Bioperine have boomed, Dr Majeed said. Curiously, this has happened continuously after the patents on both products have expired.

"That's the funny part; the patent comes off and the sales go through the roof. I can't explain it," he said.

The high volume curcumin extraction facility is located in Dobaspet. There powdered curcumin is pelletized and put through a dedicated continuous flow extractor, where a cake of the material about meter thick is slowly passed under sprays of ethanol. Dedicating the facility primarily to curcumin enhances efficiency by avoiding lengthy cleaning cycles beyond those required for compliant operation. Powdered curcumin is an exceptionally difficult ingredient to work with as it adheres easily and stains everything it touches. One portion of the facility at the back end of the production process even has its walls painted yellow to help accommodate this property.

Natural vs synthetic

Dr Majeed said Sabinsa will continue to push the quality of its curcumin ingredients in an era where synthetic curcuminoids have gained traction in the market. For his part, the important distinction is that Sabinsa is open about the source of its material and the makeup of the ultimate extract. In the case of natural curcumin, a 95% extract will consist almost entirely (sans a whiff of leftover ethanol) of material found in the source plant. For a 95% synthetic, he said the remain 5% is unspecified and comes from a petrochemical source.

"If goes into your system, it has to be a clean product," he said.

Coming soon: Part 2 of this report will look at Sami Labs' raw material sources and its relationships with its plethora of contract farmers.