



# Fighting the global food supply crisis

The resilience of our global food system is under test and strain, with the COVID-19 pandemic, political unrest in Ukraine and Russia, and unstable climate patterns. *Food & Beverage Asia* speaks with Alex Ward, COO of Next Gen Foods, on how the rise of new technologies, such as alternative protein, might be the answer to these tough times.

**Globally, events such as the conflict in Ukraine and the pandemic have disrupted the food supply chain, especially in the areas of grain and oil exports. How are alternative protein producers responding to these challenges, and what changes do you anticipate taking place in the realm of alt-protein research, particularly on the innovation front?**

**Alex Ward:** Our food system is highly dependent on globally integrated supply chains and this is not the first time they have faced disruption. As the global population continues to grow, so too will the demand for meat, thus creating further supply chain disruption. In order to meet this demand for meat in the long term, we need to rethink our food system and understand the role in which plant-based and other sustainable proteins can play to secure a more sustainable future.

In the next few years, we anticipate the growth of the alternative meat sector to accelerate

as demand for plant-based meat continues to grow. According to BCG and Blue Horizon Corporation, the global market for alternative proteins will grow from the current 13 million metric tons a year to 97 million metric tons by 2035. A Kerry research report also found that 62% of APAC consumers were interested in buying meat alternatives and 44% intended to eat more of it.

This growing awareness and education surrounding alternative protein will only continue to drive the demand for innovative and delicious plant-based meats. To date, there have already been significant improvements to the quality and taste of alternative protein, increasing consumer trust to try plant-based meats like TINDLE – which has received rave reviews for its similarity to chicken from birds.

Our mission at Next Gen Foods is to create a more sustainable global food supply

chain by providing an authentic, delicious, and versatile chicken experience with TINDLE.

**Can you also share with us your opinion on the rise of food trade protectionism as well as its impact on the alt-protein market – how can alt-protein producers ensure their products remain affordable and accessible, and what growth opportunities do you see in these trying times?**

**Ward:** Food protectionism measures have been on the rise in recent years but authorities must take a balanced approach when enforcing them. For instance, reductions in import tariffs or export restrictions may help resolve short-term individual country food security challenges, but this also drives up global market prices.

It is a common misconception that plant-based foods are niche products that cost a premium. Instead, plant-based meat uses less resources than their animal counterparts and are therefore fundamentally cheaper to produce.

This can be seen in restaurant menus across Singapore where consumers are able to order TiNDLE dishes at prices which are almost on par with their chicken counterparts. As Next Gen continues to scale its manufacturing and supply of ingredients, we foresee the price will come down to at least the level of chicken.

Next Gen will continue to grow its distribution as we expand into new markets by working alongside chefs, restaurants and operators to widen availability. With continuous product innovation, we hope to meet our customers' demands by continuing to innovate and create new additional value-add products that are delicious, nutritious, and sustainable.

**Regionally, Malaysia has imposed a ban on chicken exports to Singapore. What can alt-protein producers like Next Gen offer as a viable replacement, and what are some of the strategies you have developed for Next Gen to promote itself in the local market right now?**

**Ward:** Next Gen's first product, TiNDLE is a ridiculously good chicken made from plants, with taste, texture and culinary versatility similar to chicken from birds. TiNDLE's strong similarity to chicken from birds was demonstrated in a recent blind taste test conducted by Channel News Asia which saw TiNDLE rank high in likeness to chicken.

Next Gen is on a mission to help create a more sustainable food system with its innovative plant-based products. Next Gen is currently expanding TiNDLE into more restaurants across Singapore, and beyond, to achieve Singapore's 30 by 30 goal; to produce 30% of its nutritional needs locally by 2030.

Next Gen is currently building an R&D and innovation centre in Singapore, in

partnership with the Food Tech Innovation Centre (FTIC) which was established by Asia Sustainable Foods Platform, a company wholly-owned by Temasek. The centre will serve as a launchpad for future products and technologies, focused on finding and achieving solutions to fight the growing climate crisis.

**Ultimately, what are some of the key takeaways Next Gen has picked up in situations like these that are constantly changing regionally and globally, and how will they help shape the role of alt-protein and their producers in the years ahead?**

**Ward:** Consumer adoption is the biggest challenge to plant-based meat adoption. While meat has long been regarded as a primary source of protein, plant-based foods have been associated with the compromise of an authentic meat experience which puts consumers off. According to a Kerry research report, 70% of APAC consumers said that the plant-based meats currently do not offer the same taste and texture as real meat, adding that they would purchase the products more should these factors improve. As R&D progresses, the taste and texture of plant-based alternatives will change and the alternative proteins with authentic taste will find a place on the consumer's plate.

As we become more conscious of health and the environment, new alternative sources of protein will gain popularity as they are crucial to nourishing our growing population while mitigating the effects of the climate crisis.

**In your opinion, should alt-protein completely replace conventional protein? And with the rise of food-tech advancements in areas such as cultivated meat, do you foresee these innovations finding acceptance among consumers?**

**Ward:** We believe that alternative proteins will be almost as popular as conventional protein.

Plant-based meat has recently gained popularity in



the mainstream market and this demand will only grow as consumer awareness increases. While conventional meat will still remain, alternative proteins, like TiNDLE, will co-exist to provide an option that is comparable in taste, texture and versatility to meat.

In the future, consumers will be able to choose their protein, those who opt for alternative plant-based options will do so for a variety of reasons. From helping to combat climate change, avoid animal cruelty, to making a conscious choice to eat healthy and sustainably.

At TiNDLE, we are working on R&D for future products and breaking ground on our new research centre in Singapore, the FTIC, which will serve as a launchpad for the trial and development of new technologies, applications, and products.

As alternative proteins continue to gain popularity, so too will customers' acceptance. Even today, we are starting to see more restaurant chains introduce plant-based options on their menu, as consumers are slowly starting to be educated on the alternative. The APAC region is expected to witness a 200% increase in plant-based food and drink consumption, by 2025. **FBA**

