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AL MAHA FOODS

SETTING TRENDS
AND STANDARDS IN
INDIAN BASMATI RICE
INDUSTRY FOR ABOUT
3 DECADES.

SALMAN HABEEB

MANAGING DIRECTOR & CEO
AL MAHA FOODS INTERNATIONAL PVT. LTD.





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From Strategy to Success: The Journey of a Visionary CEO

In an exclusive conversation with Mr. Salman Habeeb, Managing Director & CEO of Al Maha Foods, valuable insights emerged about the company's strategic evolution and impressive growth journey. Under his visionary leadership, Al Maha Foods has remained steadfast in its mission to uphold the rich legacy of Basmati rice—seamlessly integrating tradition with innovation. With a strong commitment to quality and progress, the company continues to set new benchmarks to meet the ever-changing demands of a dynamic global market.

Interviewer: Can you take us through the origins of the journey of Al Maha Foods in India and share how it was established under your leadership?

Salman: The foundation of operations of the company in India can be traced back to the visionary leadership of the late Sheikh Abdul Khader Al Muhaidib. In 1996, I was entrusted with the critical responsibility of establishing a business presence in India for the Al Muhaidib Group, one of most respected and diversified business conglomerates in Saudi Arabia. The mandate was clear: to uphold the highest standards of quality and ethical integrity in the procurement of Basmati rice from India. While the mission was significant, it also posed a formidable challenge. This assignment marked the beginning of a transformative journey, one that demanded not only operational precision but also in-depth understanding of cross-cultural business environments.

A Deep Insight into the Al Maha Legacy:

It was a remarkable privilege to gain firsthand insight into the rich and deeply rooted Al Muhaidib culture through Abu Mohammed, Mr. Essam Al Muhaidib, and his esteemed brothers. Their thoughtful engagement provided us with a clear perspective on the values, vision, and strategic thinking that continue to shape the group's enduring success.

Success Story



SALMAN HABEEB
MANAGING DIRECTOR & CEO



Particularly noteworthy is the pivotal role played by Mr. Ahmed Al Muhaidib, whose dynamic leadership and forward looking approach have significantly contributed to the impressive growth and advancement of both Mayar and Al Maha companies, setting new benchmarks of excellence across the industry.

Interviewer: How did your early mentorship experiences and international exposure influence the development of your entrepreneurial vision and leadership approach?

Salman: The responsibility entrusted to me was both significant and deeply challenging. I began the journey working from home, operating independently for nearly two years to lay the foundation for operations of the company in India. By 1998, through unwavering focus and consistent effort, I had successfully built a credible and resilient presence in the region.

The path was neither straightforward nor predictable. It demanded perseverance, strategic thinking, and unyielding resilience. Yet, fueled by a clear vision, strong mission, and deep passion for the work, I steadily turned challenges into opportunities, creating a solid platform for long-term growth.

My business journey began in the early 1990s in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where I had the privilege of working alongside my father. His mentorship played an important role in introducing me to the fundamentals of business from a young age. This formative experience provided not only practical insights but also instilled in me a deep-rooted commitment to ethical principles, values that continue to guide my leadership and decision-making to this day.

By the age of 25, I had already travelled to over 25 countries, gaining rich international exposure. These experiences broadened my perspective, sharpened my cultural awareness, and enhanced my ability to navigate the complexities of global markets with confidence and competence.

Interviewer: What was the founding vision behind Al Maha Foods, and in what ways is that vision embodied in the company's operations and strategic direction today?

Salman: Al Maha Foods was established with a clear and focused mission—closely aligned with its founding partners,

the Al Muhaidib Group—to uphold uncompromising standards of quality, integrity, and transparency across every facet of its operations. From procurement to packaging, every stage of the value chain is meticulously designed to reflect the company's steadfast commitment to excellence, ethical sourcing, and customer trust.

Interviewer: What key strategies and values have enabled Al Maha Foods to sustain its leadership position and uphold its reputation in the global Basmati rice market over the years?

Salman: At the heart of Al Maha Foods' operations lies its core expertise: the sourcing and export of premium Indian Basmati rice. Renowned for its long, slender grains, signature post-cooking elongation, and rich aromatic profile, Basmati rice is more than just a staple—it is a global culinary delicacy cherished by diverse cultures.

In a world where over 120,000 varieties of rice exist and more than 3.5 billion people rely on it as a dietary cornerstone, Basmati continues to stand out as one of the most exclusive and highly sought-after types. India, as the leading exporter of rice globally, holds a strategic advantage in this segment, especially in high-demand markets such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Europe, the United States, and beyond.

Today, Al Maha Foods is recognized as one of the foremost quality assurance leaders in the Basmati rice segment and proudly ranks among the top 50 Indian Basmati rice exporters. With nearly three decades of industry presence, our unwavering commitment to quality, traceability, and ethical sourcing has cemented its reputation as a trusted name in the global food trade.

What truly sets us apart is not just its operational excellence, but the strength of our core values. Integrity, transparency, and a deeply ingrained culture of collaboration form the foundation of its corporate ethos. Our dedicated team, united by a shared vision, continues to drive consistent performance and innovation. Notably, our finance division has played a pivotal role in sustaining profitability, with the remarkable distinction of never recording a financial loss since the company's inception.

Interviewer: What were the major challenges Al Maha Foods encountered in its formative years, and how did the company navigate these obstacles to emerge as a pioneer in the Basmati rice industry?

Salman: The evolution of Al Maha Foods has been defined by perseverance, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to quality. In the formative years of India's Basmati rice industry, we operated within a challenging environment marked by underdeveloped infrastructure, fragmented supply chains, and escalating global expectations. Meeting tight shipment deadlines, building stakeholder confidence, and consistently delivering premium-grade rice were just a few of the significant hurdles encountered.

Despite these challenges, we remained steadfast in our mission. Guided by a clear strategic vision, sustained patience, and a collaborative mindset, we laid a strong foundation for a company built to endure. By embracing progressive practices and fostering long-term relationships within the agricultural and export ecosystems, Al Maha Foods navigated operational bottlenecks and steadily earned a reputation for excellence, dependability, and integrity.

Today, we stand as a pioneer and industry trendsetter in the Basmati rice segment, credited with championing innovations that have been instrumental in elevating Indian Basmati rice on the global platform.

Interviewer: What strategies does Al Maha Foods employ to uphold quality standards and drive continuous improvement across its value chain and supplier network?

Salman: At Al Maha Foods, quality is not simply a benchmark—it is the cornerstone of our operations. Our commitment to excellence is driven by a dedicated Quality Assurance (QA) team empowered with both autonomy and accountability. This structure cultivates a culture of ownership, precision, and continuous improvement at every stage of the value chain," Mr Salman elucidated.

Beyond internal excellence, Al Maha Foods places strong emphasis on reinforcing its supplier partnerships. We actively collaborate with our Indian supplier network to enhance operational capacities through comprehensive training programs, process optimization, and infrastructure development at rice mills, ensuring end-to-end alignment with global best practices.

Interviewer: In what ways does Al Maha Foods collaborate with its suppliers to uphold global quality standards and reinforce its leadership in the Basmati rice industry?

Salman: As part of its unwavering commitment to excellence, we implement rigorous supplier audits to assess and guide partners toward essential infrastructure enhancements. These evaluations are designed to help suppliers align with international quality benchmarks, ensuring consistency, safety, and optimal performance throughout the production lifecycle.

This proactive and collaborative model not only protects product integrity but also fosters enduring value across the entire supply chain. By investing in the growth and capabilities of our partners, Al Maha Foods continues to reinforce its standing as a trusted leader in the global Basmati rice industry.

Interviewer: How does Al Maha Foods strategically tailor its brand portfolio to cater to the diverse preferences of both international and domestic Basmati rice consumers?

Salman: Our establishment offers a diverse and carefully curated portfolio of premium Basmati rice brands, thoughtfully crafted to cater to the specific preferences of its international markets, particularly in Saudi Arabia, which serves as the company's primary consumer base. The product range includes both Sella and Steam variants of Basmati rice, celebrated for their distinctive texture, fragrance, and exceptional culinary performance.

Among our flagship brands in Saudi Arabia are Al Walima, Al Walima Style, Al Aila, Punjabi Al Muhaidib, Bundi, Himalaya and Mudyaf. Notably, Al Aila has been honored as the Number One Steam Rice Brand in the Kingdom—a distinction that reflects its superior quality and the deep trust it has earned among consumers. In India, Al Maha Foods markets select brands such as Perfect Choice, Al Maha, and Al Waha, addressing both domestic tastes and export requirements. Each brand exemplifies our unwavering dedication to excellence, authenticity, and consistency, ensuring that every grain of rice fulfills the promise of premium quality.

Through this robust brand portfolio, we continue to expand our global footprint and deepen consumer loyalty in key markets, further establishing our name synonymous with heritage, trust, and superior Basmati rice.

Interviewer: How does Al Maha Foods foster a people-first culture that effectively balances high-performance standards with long-term employee engagement and loyalty?

Salman: Our values of transparency, trust, and enduring relationships form the foundation of our organizational culture. Establishing operations in India was a formidable endeavor, yet over time, we have nurtured a strong and loyal team, many members of which have remained with the organization for nearly three decades. This remarkable tenure is a testament to our people-first philosophy and the mutual respect that defines every level of interaction.

We believe that each individual, regardless of role, contributes meaningful value to its collective success. A culture of consistent recognition, open dialogue, and inclusive communication helps maintain alignment and fosters a shared sense of purpose. Regular forums and leadership engagement ensure that ideas and feedback are not only welcomed but also acted upon.

Our personal engagement with team members across departments is a cornerstone of the company's ethos. These interactions are not merely symbolic—they play a vital role in transmitting and reinforcing the core values that shape the identity of Al Maha Foods. Al Maha Foods' human resource philosophy blends compassion with high performance. The company operates with clearly defined Key Result Areas (KRAs) and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), ensuring role clarity, accountability, and continuous professional development. A structured reward and recognition system—anchored by the Golden Point System—is in place to celebrate top performers while offering targeted support to employees in need of improvement.

This approach reflects the organization's core belief: investing in people fosters a culture where employees are motivated to contribute meaningfully to our growth and long-term legacy.

Interviewer: How do collaboration and adherence to ethical business practices contribute to Al Maha Foods ability to navigate industry challenges and maintain enduring partnerships?

Salman: In an industry defined by constant evolution, we face an array of annual challenges—from market volatility and changing consumer demands to logistical constraints and supply chain disruptions. Our ability to navigate these complexities lies in its relationship-driven approach, which emphasizes collaboration, transparency, and adaptability.

Robust partnerships with suppliers, vendors, and stakeholders form the cornerstone of its operational strategy. Al Maha Foods maintains clear communication of expectations, enforces a zero-tolerance policy for quality deviations, and upholds a steadfast commitment to timely and ethical payments, especially to farmers, who represent the foundational tier of the supply network.

By consistently honoring its commitments and fostering trust-based relationships, we have cultivated an ecosystem of mutual success, allowing it to lead with integrity even amidst uncertainty.

Interviewer: What initiatives has Al Maha Foods implemented to develop a sustainable and ethical supply chain while fostering long-term value for farming communities?

Salman: We believe that a sustainable supply chain is rooted in trust and accountability. By fostering an inclusive environment where every stakeholder—whether a farmer, supplier, or logistics partner—feels supported and respected, we have built a resilient ecosystem driven by shared goals.

To further this mission, Al Maha Foods actively invests in farmer awareness programs aimed at enhancing cultivation practices, promoting sustainability, and improving crop quality. These initiatives not only uplift agricultural output but also empower farming communities and solidify our long-term commitment to ethical sourcing.

Simultaneously, we maintain a vigilant eye on external market factors such as foreign currency trends and paddy price fluctuations. This proactive, foresight-led approach enables informed decision-making, mitigates risks, and ensures business continuity. As a result, we continue to position ourselves as a responsible, future-ready leader in the global rice trade.

Interviewer: In what ways does Al Maha Foods incorporate innovation and strategic foresight into its operational framework to remain competitive in an ever evolving global market?

Salman: We stand out owing to our culture of innovation, adaptability, and strategic foresight.

In an industry shaped by dynamic global trends, we do more than respond—we anticipate. Our forward-looking approach is embedded into every facet of the organization, with structured action plans developed across annual, monthly, and daily cycles.

Interviewer: How does contingency planning support Al Maha Foods in effectively responding to evolving market conditions and industry challenges?

Salman: Contingency planning forms a vital pillar of Al Maha Foods’ operational framework. With clearly defined Plan A and Plan B strategies in place, we maintain the flexibility to pivot swiftly in response to evolving market dynamics. Every decision is backed by real-time insights, rigorous market research, and comprehensive competitive analysis, ensuring we remain agile and future-ready in a rapidly transforming agro-food sector.

Interviewer: What distinguishes Al Maha Foods’ approach to employee well-being and engagement, and how has it contributed to cultivating a strong, value-driven organizational culture?

Salman: What truly distinguishes Al Maha Foods is its unwavering people-first philosophy. We firmly believe that employee engagement and well-being are directly linked to long-term business success. With a team of hundreds of dedicated professionals powering our mission, we proudly maintain a Happiness Index exceeding 95%—a powerful testament to our strong internal culture and commitment to fostering a positive, inclusive, and high-performing work environment.

At Al Maha Foods, our work culture is defined by a deep and unwavering commitment to people. We take immense pride in cultivating a people-centric organization where the well-being, growth, and satisfaction of our team members are not just priorities—they are foundation to our success. Our organizational culture is grounded in collaboration, mutual respect, and personal development. The company believes that the foundation of a thriving business lies in the well-being and engagement of its people. This belief is reflected in all facets of the workplace, ranging from open communication and inclusive of decision-making to continuous mentorship and professional growth opportunities.

We are known for our holistic and heartfelt approach to employee engagement. Beyond the office walls, we extend our appreciation to the families of its employees, involving them in key events and celebrations. By recognizing the role of loved ones in each individual’s journey, Al Maha Foods fosters a genuine sense of community, transforming personal milestones into shared accomplishments.

One of our most enduring achievements has been the creation of a cohesive, values-driven team. Recruitment at Al Maha Foods is purposeful, with a strong emphasis on selecting individuals whose principles align with the organization’s ethos. Each team member is thoughtfully placed in roles that match their strengths and nurtured within an environment defined by empathy, collaboration, and purpose.

Leadership development forms a cornerstone of the company’s long-term growth strategy. Employees are equipped with the tools, training, and platforms they need to evolve into the next generation of leaders. Through technical programs, experiential learning, and outbound development initiatives, Al Maha Foods empowers its workforce to stay ahead in a competitive industry. Annual family gatherings serve as a highlight of our calendar, not just as celebrations of professional accomplishments, but also as heartfelt tributes to the families who support them. During these occasions, Al Maha Foods honors employees who have been part of the organization for nearly three decades. These recognitions extend to spouses, parents, and children, acknowledging the collective contributions that support every long-standing career.

At its core, Al Maha Foods is more than just a company—it is a community that builds careers, nurtures relationships, and cultivates a lasting sense of belonging. This people-centric ethos continues to define our identity and fuel our success as a trusted global name in the Basmati rice industry.

Interviewer: How do technology and AI contribute to Al Maha Foods’ strategic efforts to maintain a competitive edge in an increasingly data-driven global market?

Salman: Looking ahead, we are making significant strides in digital transformation. Investments are being directed toward artificial intelligence (AI) integration and advanced technological solutions to align with global standards and meet the rising demands of a modern, data-driven food supply chain. At Al Maha Foods, innovation is not a mere aspiration—it is a strategic imperative woven into the fabric of the company’s evolution.

Interviewer: What core values and leadership principles define your approach, and how have they influenced your professional journey and the development of your team culture?

Salman: For me, leadership is defined not by hierarchy but by empathy, adaptability, and vision. Our company follows a situational leadership approach, recognizing that effective guidance requires flexibility and personalized support tailored to each individual’s strengths, challenges, and context.

This model aligns closely with the principles of transformational leadership, emphasizing the importance of inspiring, empowering, and collaborating with teams to unlock their full potential. Central to this approach is a deep-rooted belief in the value of people—their growth, their purpose, and their impact. Under the leadership of individuals who prioritize connection over command, we foster a culture where winning the team is seen as the first and most important step to winning in the market. Here, people take precedence over profitability because sustainable success is only achievable when individuals feel valued, supported, and engaged.

We believe that when the right people are placed in the right roles and are empowered to excel, profitability follows organically. Conversely, losing talented individuals means far more than losing skills—it risks compromising the very foundation on which the organization stands.

Our leadership culture is rooted in trust, talent development, and emotional intelligence, creating an environment where every team member feels seen, heard, and inspired to contribute their best. It is this unwavering people-first ethos that continues to drive the company’s resilience, reputation, and remarkable journey in the global agro-food industry.

Interviewer: How do teamwork, resilience and a commitment to excellence influence the daily operations and long-term success of Al Maha Foods?

Salman: We believe that securing the future of those who walk beside them is integral to securing their own. This belief shapes their ethos, whether they’re empowering employees, supporting vendors, or strengthening partnerships. With resilience at their core and a win-win philosophy guiding their actions, they navigate challenges with a collective mindset, always striving for mutually beneficial outcomes.

Our benchmark for performance is ambitious yet clear: zero errors. From routine operations to strategic initiatives, we aim for precision, fostering a culture where every team member is motivated to take ownership, excel in their roles, and collaborate meaningfully. It is this unwavering commitment to quality and unity that drives our resilience and long-standing success in an increasingly competitive industry.

Interviewer: Could you share some of the most defining and proudest moments in Al Maha Foods journey?

Salman: Success at Al Maha Foods isn’t measured solely by grand milestones. It’s also found in the quiet triumphs of everyday excellence. Whether it’s an employee surpassing expectations or a partner achieving new heights with our support, these moments collectively define our journey. Still, several commercial achievements stand as pillars of our ongoing legacy:





**#1 RICE SUPPLIER FOR MAYAR FOODS FOR EIGHT CONSECUTIVE YEARS—
AN HONOR CROWNED WITH OUR 8TH PLATINUM AWARD, THE HIGHEST
RECOGNITION GIVEN TO ANY INDIAN SUPPLIER.**

- Rigorous Quality Control, inspecting about 200,000 metric tons of Indian Basmati rice annually to meet our uncompromising standards.
- Recognized as a Great Place to Work for four consecutive years, with team satisfaction scores consistently reaching 95%, and even as high as 98% in several categories.



A Happiness Index that soared from a strong 87% pre-COVID-19 to an exceptional 95% today, reflecting the strength of our internal support systems and the empathy embedded in our leadership during turbulent times.

These accomplishments reflect not just performance metrics but the spirit of the people who make Al Maha Foods what it is—a company driven by integrity, purpose, and relentless dedication.

Interviewer: How is Al Maha Foods shaping its future through innovation, responsible business practices, and a commitment to sustainable growth?

Salman: As we look ahead, Al Maha Foods remains anchored in its foundational values: people-centric growth, innovation, and social responsibility. Our foremost priority will always be the well-being and happiness of our team, fostering a workplace where every individual feels empowered and appreciated.

Interviewer: How is Al Maha Foods enhancing its CSR impact, fostering innovation and positioning itself for future growth?

Salman: Aligned with our enduring commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Al Maha Foods is expanding its outreach initiatives to create a deeper, more meaningful impact on underserved communities. The company upholds a guiding philosophy: success becomes truly significant only when it is shared.

Innovation continues to be the cornerstone of Al Maha Foods' long-term vision. This has positioned Al Maha Foods at the forefront of scientific advancement in the rice industry. Building on this legacy, we are now in the process of establishing a dedicated DNA research facility, reinforcing its leadership in quality assurance and varietal authenticity.

In a bold move toward the future, Al Maha Foods is also exploring the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into its operations. Specifically, we are developing pioneering solutions in automated grain identification—a transformative step aimed at improving accuracy, consistency, and speed in its quality control processes.

Interviewer: What is Al Maha Foods commitment to upholding global standards, and how does the company ensure consistent excellence across its international markets?

At Al Maha Foods, our pursuit of excellence is reflected in the internationally recognized certifications and accreditations we proudly hold. These milestones represent our steadfast commitment to quality, safety, and regulatory compliance across global markets:

- Star Export House, recognized by the Government of India
- NABL-Certified Laboratory, offering advanced testing and quality assurance
- SFDA Approval, meeting the rigorous standards of the Saudi Food and Drug Authority
- ISO 9001:2015 Certification, demonstrating robust quality management systems
- ISO 22000 Certification, aligning with global food safety management protocols

These accreditations serve as a testament to our dedication to operational excellence, product integrity, and our ongoing commitment to delivering superior quality to customers around the world.

Interviewer: What message would you like to convey to our global readership on the importance of empowering individuals and driving meaningful progress?

Salman: At Al Maha Foods, our guiding philosophy is both straightforward and deeply impactful: Earn the trust of your people by recognizing their strengths and helping them realize their fullest potential. When leadership is rooted in empathy and a commitment to uplifting others, success is not just achievable—it becomes inevitable.



In today's dynamic global landscape, every business, regardless of its domain, must be anchored by a clear and compelling vision. Excellence is not achieved overnight; it is cultivated through intentional actions, strategic focus, and an unwavering commitment to purpose. Progress emerges step by step, driven by well-defined goals and powered by integrity and determination.

We encourage leaders everywhere to pursue their ambitions with clarity of intent, to build with transparency, and to lead with purpose. In doing so, the journey becomes just as fulfilling as the outcomes it yields.