

Inarguably the most important trade fair for the meat processing sector, the recently held IFFA was a resounding success for both exhibitors and visitors alike.

Frankfurt's hold on innovation



Horst Niedlich, head of the technical fairs division of Messe Frankfurt: "The industry develops its innovations for IFFA and visitors wait with their investment decisions for what's new at IFFA." Photo: Pietro Sutera.

And so it is that every three years, the meat industry gathers in Frankfurt, Germany, to witness the latest advances in meat processing technology. By far the largest such gathering, IFFA manages to attract

all the major players in the meat business and then some. And this year's event was no different.

More visitors

According to figures released by the organisers, visitor numbers

were up by 7% as compared to the numbers for the show in 2001. In total, 57,538 visitors from around 100 countries attended the show, and this in a year that has seen one third of the world's trade in meat affected by animal disease outbreaks, according to FAO.

Of course, things are very different from three years ago, when Europe was gripped in a major crisis stemming from the spread of BSE to its bovine herds, as well as FMD to many important animal-breeding areas in Northern Europe. In spite of the fact that much of the world's trade in meat remains interrupted, the feeling was definitely upbeat. Over 80% of foreign visitors to IFFA assessed the current business and economic situations as being good or satisfactory.



In total, 57,538 visitors from around 100 countries attended the show, a 7% increase on 2001. Photo: Petra Welzel.

Happy exhibitors

From exhibitor's point of view, the

show was unmatched. According to the organisers, three quarters of them gave the fair top marks for visitor quality and presence of the visitor target groups required. In fact, business was brisk and involved large volumes. The main complaint from exhibitors was that the show was one or two days too long for their taste; indeed, the fair's floor was much quieter on its last open day. However, it would have been impossible for visitors to truly take everything in without the full six days the show offered.

According to Horst Niedlich, head of the technical fairs division of Messe Frankfurt, the organisers, "IFFA has once again confirmed its position as the world's most important trade fair for the meat processing sector. The industry develops its innovations so they are ready for presentation at the fair. Visitors know this and wait with their investment decisions until they have seen what's new at IFFA." Increasingly, buyers from related segments of the foodstuffs sector are also integrating IFFA into their decision-making process, he added.

Berthold Gassmann, head of the meat processing machines department of the Association of German Machine and Plant Manufacturers (Verband Deutscher Maschinen und Anlagenbau, VDMA) and Chairman of the IFFA Advisory Council, had this to say: "IFFA fulfilled our high expectations. The first four days alone showed a very positive climate for investments. Our impression was that the number of visitors from Germany remained stable in comparison to the previous event, whereas there was significantly more from abroad. As expected, numerous trade visitors came from the new EU countries and other East European nations, especially from Russia. We were

also pleased to see more visitors from South America. IFFA showed clearly that the international meat-processing sector is a growth market with a considerable potential for development. Once again, the fair in Frankfurt proved to be the ideal platform for our industry."

Major trends

There were a significant number of innovative machines on the floor, covering the entire chain of meat production, from slaughtering and cutting down through further processing. In spite of the wide variety of machinery on display, three major trends could be easily discerned at IFFA: automation, hygiene and traceability.

As labour costs have risen in manufacturing, equipment makers have shifted their focus towards automation of the production line. Most of the machines now being sold to the food industry require only one operator (if any) as well as being relatively user-friendly, a feature sought-after in an industry in which workers often don't stay long on the jobs and hence don't accumulate skills and knowledge. Automation encompasses many different strategies, from continuous sausage fillers that don't require the reloading of casings to advanced robots that until a few years ago were more at home in car manufacturing plants than in the middle of a meat processing plant.

Food safety has always been in an issue for the meat industry, but it seems to be getting its lion's share of attention lately. Governments and consumers have become less tolerant of any kind of contamination in the food supply. Accordingly, food processors have responded by developing plans to minimise the risks of contamination and in turn, machine manufacturers



There were a significant number of innovative machines on the floor, covering the entire chain of meat production, with three major trends in their design: automation, hygiene and traceability.

Photo: Petra Welzel.

have responded by redesigning machines that are both easier to clean and have less blind spots where contaminating agents could easily hide in.

Traceability

Finally, traceability has been the big buzzword for the past few years. What to do if despite a companies' best efforts, their products become contaminated? If the product has already been shipped, a recall is required to avoid potential infection.

However, knowing exactly which lots to recall can save producers a lot of time and money, not to mention help avoid a few headaches. This is where traceability systems come in, allowing a precise pinpointing. Furthermore, new regulations regarding the origin of foodstuffs have also forced many in the meat industry to establish tracking programs, in order to be able to show where a particular product came from.

As new trends emerge in the marketplace, machine manufacturers will respond with further advances. Expect even more in three year's time at the next IFFA, sure to be another fulfilling and successful exhibition. **MI**