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Carmen's Best Dairy Products Prepares to Go Global

It was a warm and humid day in December 2014. On the drive home from Real Fresh Dairy Farms, Inc. (RFDFI), Paco Magsaysay was going through the events of the day when his smartphone rang.

"Hello, Paco here."

"Paco, this is Jenky. I'd like you to know that the FDA permit was approved today," his food safety and food quality manager said.

"Wow! This is good news! I guess this means we will make Carmen's Best ice cream a global brand soon," Magsaysay said. After discussing business matters that required urgent attention, Magsaysay hung up. He smiled as he flashbacked to Carmen's Best Dairy Products' start four years ago. He could not believe that demand for Carmen's Best artisanal ice cream had grown so much. Still, his mind raced ahead. Is the company ready to bring Carmen's Best ice cream to distant shores? Given current production capacity, what supply chain management-related challenges need to be addressed? Specifically, what major supply chain management issue do I need to overcome? What options do I have? As his driver announced that they had reached their destination, Magsaysay broke from his introspection. This means we need to work double-time, he thought.



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Historical Background

Carmen's Best Dairy Products dated back to 2007 when Magsaysay's father, former Senator Ramon Banzon Magsaysay, Jr., also known to many as Jun Magsaysay, established RFDFI in Barangay Masaya, Bay, Laguna, approximately 40 miles from Manila on the major island of Luzon in the Philippines.¹ RFDFI produced Holly's 100% premium farm fresh milk. While it was sold at weekend markets and Figaro Coffee Company, Seattle's Best, Amici Restaurant, the LJC Group of Restaurants, and the Floating Island Restaurant of the Makati Medical Center,² RFDFI had surplus milk that remained unsold. Magsaysay, Jr. asked his son to help him sell the surplus milk. And so Carmen's Best Dairy Products was born. Magsaysay incorporated the company with the Securities and Exchange Commission in October 2009 as a corporate vehicle for processing and selling dairy products made from the excess milk.³

Magsaysay saw the opportunity to focus on the artisanal ice cream business when Amanpulo, an exclusive beach resort on Palawan Island, Philippines started buying Holly's milk. Magsaysay thought that Holly's milk must be good. What crossed his mind then was which dairy product he could create that would use the surplus milk and at the same time capitalize on its inherent creamy quality. At first, Magsaysay tried producing flavored milk, yogurt, cheese, and *pastillas*,ⁱ but found it boring. It was not until a year later that he thought of making the ice cream he called Carmen's Best. He named it for his daughter, Carmen, who was 12 years old at the time.⁴

YouTube was Magsaysay's first tutor in ice cream making.⁵ Initially, he started with the three most common ice cream flavors: chocolate, strawberry, and vanilla. He experimented in his home kitchen in Ayala Alabang Village (AAV), an upscale subdivision in the suburbs of Manila, using a single serving gelato machine. He would produce 10 ounces per run, the equivalent of about two scoops of ice cream. He tweaked the combination of fresh milk and cream, trying to find the right combination. Producing test samples in pint-sized ice cream tubs, Magsaysay asked family and friends to try his ice cream and the response was encouraging.⁶ But Magsaysay had his day job; he and his father ran other enterprises like Asian Vision Cable Holdings, Inc.⁷ Ice cream making was merely a hobby. However, when inquiries and orders started to pick up in late 2011, he started going door to door, trying to sell his ice cream in his village at the price of USD 7.69ⁱⁱ or Php 350 per pint.⁸

Since he spent most of his childhood in the United States, Magsaysay was an avid consumer of different ice cream brands. So, when he moved back to the Philippines, he started missing his favorite ice cream flavors. It was then that the germ of an idea of creating foreign flavors began to take root. Instead of sticking with the common ice cream local flavors that used a commercial process to make the recombined ice cream productsⁱⁱⁱ other ice cream makers churned out, he developed his first batch of favorite ice cream flavors (salted caramel, Brazilian coffee, butter pecan, and malted milk).⁹ He researched recipes and bought the David Lebovitz book, "The Perfect Scoop: Ice Creams, Sorbets, Granitas, and Sweet Accompaniments" to get recipe ideas.¹⁰

Soon thereafter, Magsaysay encountered problems selling his tubs of ice cream exclusively to residents of AAV. Not everyone was excited about his ice cream. So, he decided it was time to sell his product outside the village. He braved the Saturday crowds at the Salcedo Market in Makati City, about a half hour away from AAV, standing under the sun, to have customers taste his ice cream.¹¹

ⁱ A Filipino delicacy — bite-size candy made from milk and sugar.

ⁱⁱ Exchange rate as of July 29, 2015 was 1 USD = Php 45.504. Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas. 29 July 2015. Accessed 29 July 2015. <<http://www.bsp.gov.ph/statistics/sdds/exchrte.htm>>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Recombined products are those that are made from fresh milk plus a mixture of water and powdered milk.

It was not until the third year of Carmen's Best's existence that people started to take it seriously. More grocery stores and restaurants started noticing the product when customers would ask if Carmen's Best ice cream was available. It was at this juncture that Magsaysay decided to take the business to the next level by focusing on the science behind ice cream making. He researched training programs and eventually opted to go to Pennsylvania State University in State College, Pennsylvania, U.S. to take a short course in ice cream making.¹² After the one-week, USD-2,000 course (Php 91,008), he came home with the Keeney award, "Most Promising" given to the student showing the greatest potential for succeeding in the ice cream business.¹³ After his stint at Penn State, he came back home to make a more balanced product with emulsifiers and stabilizers. Unabatedly, sales rose when he sold a much improved version of his product.¹⁴

Company Profile

Organization and Management

At the helm of Carmen's Best Dairy Products was its creator and founder, Francisco "Paco" Delgado Magsaysay, the son of former Senator Ramon B. Magsaysay, Jr. and grandson of the much revered Philippine president, the late Ramon F. Magsaysay, Sr. Magsaysay was the father of three children: two sons and one daughter (see **Appendix A**).¹⁵

Born in 1968, Magsaysay stayed in Manila until the age of 10 after which he moved to San Francisco, U.S. where he spent a year in junior high school.¹⁶ He then went back to Manila for a year as his mom relocated to Houston, Texas, U.S. After a year, he joined her in Houston and stayed there from 1981-1993.¹⁷ He finished high school and completed a bachelor's degree in marketing at the University of St. Thomas in Houston.¹⁸ When he came back to the Philippines in 1993 after his father ran for vice president the previous year and lost, he decided to move back to Manila, pursuing his master in entrepreneurship degree at the Asian Institute of Management in 2008.¹⁹

When Carmen's Best Dairy Products was incorporated with the Securities and Exchange Commission, it had a start-up capitalization of USD 20,000 (Php 910,080). In his ice cream business, Magsaysay had a food scientist (food safety manager), a finance expert, a logistics consultant, and his father on his management team.²⁰

Two years later, under the direction of his food safety and food quality manager, his production group was comprised of two teams of 10 workers each, with one team working the 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. shift and another working from 12 p.m. to 8 p.m. The company used biometrics to monitor the attendance of its workers. Each day that they reported for work, they were entitled to one meal and one snack. Besides his production group, Magsaysay had five drivers who brought the fresh milk from RFDFI and delivered the finished goods to the company's retail outlets.²¹

Marketing Mix

Product

Carmen's Best ice cream was made of ingredients of the highest quality possible (fresh milk, fresh eggs, pure sugar cane and a higher fat content). Magsaysay was quick to emphasize that the secret behind Carmen's Best Dairy Products was its homemade mix. Fresh milk was pasteurized at 76.5 degrees High Temperature Short Time which took 15 seconds compared to the Ultra High Temperature processing of other milk producers and ice cream makers. Carmen's Best artisanal ice cream and gelato was made of 80% dairy cream extracted from 100% premium farm fresh cow's milk, while other ice cream makers used recombined products to produce their ice cream.

How about the flavors he developed? How did he select the flavors he made? Magsaysay claimed there was a story behind each flavor. Salted caramel was the first flavor he created from a recipe he picked out from Lebovitz's book. Brazilian coffee was the next flavor he developed to compete with Haagen Dazs which served as his benchmark. Butter pecan was added as it was his favorite ice cream when he lived in Houston, while malted milk made from Horlick's powder in tablet form and malteasers was created because he remembered that during his younger years, he and his friends loved eating malteasers, which they believed made them strong enough to wrestle each other to the ground.²²

All 40 flavors, categorized as Best Seller, Special Flavors and Regular Flavors (see **Appendix B and C**), were built from scratch.²³ Many flavors that Magsaysay developed were inspired by his travels abroad. For example, Spanish *Turon* reminded him of a flavor he had when visiting Barcelona.²⁴ "Hokey Pokey" was developed when he went to New Zealand. "Nuts About You" was originally inspired by the "Nuts to You flavor" created by Baskin and Robbins in Japan. Furthermore, when he noticed that 75% of the "likes" Carmen's Best got in its Facebook page came from women, he took pains to come up with flavors to cater to this vital market segment particularly since he also got feedback that women often ate his ice cream when they were feeling down after breaking up with their partners. One such flavor is "He's Not Worth It." This flavor was created for women who were feeling bad after a relationship that turned sour. At first he wanted to call this concoction "Mississippi Mudpie" but then he realized he would have to explain it. So, he just called it "He's Not Worth It."²⁵ Other flavors evolved over the succeeding months such as Peanut Butter Cup, Pistachio Almond Fudge, Brown Butter Almond Brittle, and Twix. Though Magsaysay's kids were not active in the business, they did share feedback with him at times. In fact, the Twix flavor was suggested by his daughter, Carmen.²⁶

When he was asked by one of his vendors what his base recipe was, he replied that Carmen's Best Dairy Products did not have one because all their ice cream was made differently. Some flavors needed four eggs, while others required eight eggs, and some needed more sugar.²⁷ Magsaysay insisted on consistently using ingredients of the best quality even if this meant having to source from distant places. For example, vanilla beans used in Madagascar Vanilla were imported from Madagascar. Pistachio, which was used in two flavors (Pistachio and Pistachio Almond Fudge), was sourced from Italy.²⁸ Magsaysay contacted artist Roberto Alejandro to design his packaging. Because Magsaysay conceived Carmen's Best ice cream as a feminine brand, each tub (see **Appendix D**) was packaged in a dark blue hue.²⁹

Price

A pint of Carmen's Best ice cream cost Php 350 (USD 7.69) during its debut and in 2013 the price was increased by Php 20 (USD 0.43) to Php 370 (USD 8.13) per pint of the regular flavors. For flavors with more expensive ingredients, the price per pint was Php 420 (USD 9.22). Initially, Carmen's Best ice cream was positioned for the high-end market that could afford to pay an ultra-premium price for a product with superior quality. However, Puregold, one of the supermarket chains catering to the middle class market, gave Carmen's Best Ice Cream a try and it sold out immediately, proving that the ice cream could capture the middle class as well.³⁰ Unlike its competitors, Carmen's Best had a unique business model that included cash on delivery terms for all outlets carrying the Carmen's Best ice cream brand.³¹

Place

Magsaysay's first target market consisted of AAV residents who would order only occasionally when they entertained at home. Later on, he realized that not all of them really wanted to buy his product though he started to have quite a following. He shifted his attention outside the village and tried pushing his product in weekend markets in Makati City and Quezon City.³²

Carmen's Best Ice Cream was available at 97 retail distribution locations all over the Philippines including Rustan's and Puregold supermarkets as well as restaurants.³³ Some retail distribution outlets for Carmen's Best Ice Cream were provided with freezers with the brand name. Some of these retail distribution outlets had display freezers similar to the one shown in **Appendix E**.

In January 2015, Philippine Airlines (PAL) staff served two flavors of Carmen's Best Ice Cream to Pope Francis on his flight back to Rome after his five-day state visit to the Philippines. At the time Magsaysay received the order, he had no idea that PAL placed the order so that his ice cream could be served to the Pope and his party. He only found this out from the newspapers. Shortly thereafter, PAL began carrying three Carmen's Best ice cream flavors, which it served on its long flights to the United States, Canada, London, and Japan to business class passengers: Malted Milk, Rocky Road, and Salted Caramel.³⁴

Promotion

When Carmen's Best ice cream was created, Magsaysay used to sell it only to friends and neighbors within AAV, a plush subdivision in southern Manila. Family friends would occasionally place orders for his artisanal ice cream when they had parties. Soon, word spread about his artisanal ice cream such that even after attending mass, he would have people whom he did not know come up to him and ask him if he had available stock or if he had other flavors.³⁵

Under the slogan "Pure indulgence," he did a lot of cold calling. He supplemented his selling efforts with social media with Facebook becoming his main selling tool. Besides Facebook, Carmen's Best Dairy Products also maintained Twitter and Instagram accounts.³⁶ Publicity generated by Pope Francis' Philippines' visit also helped boost ice cream sales. This exposure led to Magsaysay guesting on the television shows of Jessica Soho and Kris Aquino.³⁷

Competitors

Of all the ice cream players, Magsaysay considered Haagen Dazs its only direct competitor, though Magsaysay only sold on a wholesale basis.³⁸ In 1998, Haagen Dazs entered the Philippine ice cream market and for 14 years operated a total of four branches located at the SM Mall of Asia, Robinsons Mall, Shangri-La Mall, and Eastwood Mall in Manila. General Mills Philippines, which distributed Haagen Dazs, disclosed that it had plans of putting up five to 10 more branches, but instead decided to close up shop in 2011 because the brand was unable to attract enough customers.³⁹

The ice cream industry in the Philippines was led by Unilever RFM Ice Cream Inc., accounting for 49% of total share in peso value from 2013-2014. Unilever RFM ice Cream Inc. together with Nestle Philippines, Inc. and San Miguel PureFoods Co. Inc. made up the top three ice cream players in the country.⁴⁰

A number of ice cream enterprises known as scooping stations had cropped up over the past two decades. One of these was Sebastian's Ice Cream, which was 100% Filipino-owned and operated by 39-year old Ian Carandang, its head *sorbetero*^{41, iv}. It was established in 2005 and claimed to be "the original and premiere artisanal ice cream in Manila." It had six outlets in Manila and one in Tagaytay City. Three scooping stations were located at The Podium, SM Mall of Asia, and Regis Center in front of the Ateneo de Manila University. Its two resellers were The Market Deli and Manila Polo Club, which were both located in Makati City. In addition, the company had two partners that also carried their brand: MADECA Fil-Mex Fusion in Mandaluyong City and Antonio's in Tagaytay City,⁴² which is south of Manila in Cavite province.

Operations

Magsaysay's kitchen had been his first "factory."⁴³ Eventually, demand for his product had grown to a point where his kitchen capacity was bursting at the seams and appeared to no longer sustain the production volume required.⁴⁴ He explored leasing a facility near the Cash and Carry supermarket in Makati City, but decided not to go ahead with it because he believed that sooner or later the company would have to move again.⁴⁵ Carmen's Best Dairy Products planned on moving its core operations to Techno-freeze, a AAA facility in Laguna Technopark,⁴⁶ one of the Philippines' first privately owned industrial parks located in Biñan, Laguna, Philippines.⁴⁷

The company had eight to 10 major suppliers. Since the company sourced all its fresh milk from RFDFI, it was its largest customer, easily consuming 20% of the company's total production. Other ingredients were primarily imported from abroad. Supplier choice depended on how the flavors tasted and not on the basis of the company's potential profit margins. Magsaysay's focus was on superior quality and it extended to all facets of the ice cream supply chain where Carmen's Best Dairy Products operated. Magsaysay prioritized product quality over profitability. He indicated his margins were thin, but what was important to him was that his customers were happy.⁴⁸

The workers were divided into the three major tasks that needed to be accomplished every day: preparation, freezing, and packing. The ice cream that was produced today was mainly delivered tomorrow. Daily production involved a buffer stock good for five to seven days.⁴⁹

Sitting on the PGH Medical Foundation board, Magsaysay had been sharing his blessings by donating to the foundation for the benefit of indigent patients.⁵⁰ For every pint sold, Magsaysay set aside Php 1 for the foundation.⁵¹

Taking Carmen's Best to Distant Shores

In 2012, the classic ice cream segment, which included special ice cream (non-fat, low-fat, take home and bulk orders) accounted for 80% of the global retail ice cream industry. Prospects for global retail ice cream players were promising with revenue forecast at USD 74 billion in 2018. Demand drivers included favorable demographic factors, increasing consumer income, and awareness toward frozen desserts. Product development and innovation provided growth opportunities while players needed to address the continuing challenges of maintaining price and quality, brand loyalty, and consumer growth in view of the large pool of competitors in the market.⁵²

^{iv} Ice cream seller

The future of the ice cream industry in the Philippines was bright according to Euromonitor International since ice cream continued to be a mainstay in Filipino celebrations, and all the more in hot and humid weather. With the expanding middle class, consumers were expected to try premium ice cream brands.⁵³

Magsaysay was eyeing the ASEAN market, specifically, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore.⁵⁴ A boost in demand for novel flavors and premium ice cream was expected to characterize the Singapore ice cream market.⁵⁵ A similar trend in terms of consumer preference for premium ice cream was expected in Hong Kong.⁵⁶ Magsaysay envisioned Carmen's Best ice cream as a high quality Filipino artisanal ice cream brand recognized and patronized all over the world. Thus, after finally obtaining his Food and Drug Administration permit in December 2014 after two long years of trying, he had his sights on getting Philippine Export Zone Authority accreditation.

The Challenges

Recently, a new schedule was implemented to streamline operations. Instead of two shifts, the two teams working on the major tasks of preparation, freezing, and packing were asked to come in on different days: one team on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays; and the other, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Both teams worked from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. However, a crisis situation developed. Because freezing time was reduced, about 30% of client orders were in danger of not being fulfilled in time. Carmen's Best Dairy Products was trying to find ways to avoid a recurrence of this situation, which it remedied by having its employees work overtime.⁵⁷

Just the other day, Magsaysay had talked to the Discovery Suites Manila chef who asked him to send ice cream samples for evaluation. When he informed a member of his management team, he was reminded that given their current orders, it would be a challenge meeting additional orders in the metropolis.⁵⁸

Pondering Export Readiness

Amid promising export possibilities, Magsaysay realized that he needed to examine his readiness for the export market. He knew that it was necessary to address the many supply chain management-related challenges primarily because serving the export market would mean having to stop Philippine production for a few days. He would have to quadruple his current production capacity to meet the required export volume — filling a 20-foot container — meaning he would have to produce 20,400 pints.⁵⁹ He wondered which options would allow him to overcome this supply chain management problem.

Like other challenges he faced in the past, he knew he would overcome every obstacle that came his way.

Appendix A

Former Senator Ramon B. Magsaysay, Jr. and his son, Francisco "Paco" D. Magsaysay (President of Carmen's Best)



Magsaysay and his three children



Source: Carmen's Best Dairy Products

Appendix B

Carmen's Best Flavors

Best Seller Flavors

Malted Milk
Brazilian Coffee

Special Flavors

Spanish Turon
Green Tea
Salted Caramel
Butter Pecan
Pistachio
Eggnog

Regular Flavors

Melon Sherbet
Ube
Strawberry
Rocky Road
Milk Chocolate
Maple Walnut
Madagascar Vanilla
Honey
Hokey Pokey
Hazelnut
Dark Chocolate
Cookies and Cream
Cookie Dough
Coconut
Cheese
Cereal Milk
Avocado
Macapuno

Source: Carmen's Best. "Our Flavors." Accessed 22 Apr.2015. <<http://www.carmensbest.com/our-flavors/>>.

Appendix C

Selected Carmen's Best Ice Cream Flavors

Salted Caramel



Pistachio



Hokey Pokey



Appendix C (Continued)

Selected Carmen's Best Ice Cream Flavors

Pistachio Almond Fudge

Brown Butter



Appendix C (Continued)

Selected Carmen's Best Ice Cream Flavors

Butter Pecan



Nuts About You



Baklava



Appendix C (Continued)

Selected Carmen's Best Ice Cream Flavors

Cookie Dough



Milk Chocolate



Source: Carmen's Best Dairy Products

Appendix D

Carmen's Best Packaging



Source: Carmen's Best Dairy Products



Appendix E

Carmen's Best Display Freezer at The Landmark, Makati City



Source: Carmen's Best Dairy Products

Endnotes

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