

# Agricultural evolution

**As one of the oldest and largest chemical fertiliser manufacturing companies in the Philippines, Atlas Fertilizer Corporation is playing a critical role in the country's agricultural development.**

IMAGES BEN BOHANE

**A**tlas Fertilizer Corporation has a long history of almost 60 years in the Philippines. It is the only company of its kind to have coverage of the entire country, working with the local farming communities to help them improve their crops and increase yields.

A subsidiary of Sojitz Corporation, Atlas is able to leverage off of its mother company's expertise and technology to deliver the most value to its customers. It only produces pure chemical mixtures for its fertilisers and this gives it a unique point of difference in the marketplace. Takashi Sumi has been overseeing Atlas's operations as CEO since 2012. He says that despite the Philippines being a challenging environment to work in, it is a rewarding one.

"Our mission statement is to continuously contribute to agriculture in the Philippines," he explains. "Our goal is to do this through our quality farm practices. The Philippines is not the richest country, it is still developing. More than 40 per cent of the poverty ratio in the country belongs to rural poverty but 90 percent of the rural poverty is really in the agriculture and fisheries sectors. And nearly half of the working population is doing something related to agriculture. What we have to think about is how we can help these poor farmers to increase their crop yields so they can provide a more comfortable life for their families. We can do that by helping them with proper fertilisation and agriculture technology." >>



**Name** Takashi Sumi  
**Company** Atlas Fertilizer Corporation  
**Position** President and CEO  
**HQ** Manila, Philippines  
**Employees** 400 direct hired employees



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When Takashi was first appointed to the role several years ago he had several key areas to address which he believed would take the business to new heights. The first was to implement a clear vision and to get the whole team on board with a new mindset. He improved efficiencies and reduced inventory, launched a new

marketing and branding strategy, and changed the cost structure to improve the financial statements. In addition to all of this he made innovation an important part of Atlas's ethos.

"There were so many things that I had to work on that were very important to the

**"Our mission statement is to continuously contribute to agriculture in the Philippines." - Takashi Sumi**

business," he says. "I had to change the organisation, change the rules, and I asked all of our employees to understand. That was very hard and proper communication was very important during that process."

This was then complemented by a strong distribution system and robust relationships with suppliers and other corporate alliances. "We had to be honest and sincere with them, and we had to make them understand our company's policy, while also making them sympathise with our mission and vision," Takashi notes. The final aim was to help to raise up the agricultural industry standard in the Philippines by

working closely with the farmers, teaching them about techniques which would improve the fruits of their labour.

Atlas approached this in two ways. First, it looked at how it could improve the farmer's classes and technical seminars that were already running for farmers and planters in rural areas. Takashi says it was important to explain to attendees the benefits of using Atlas's technology and the benefits of making the fertilisers a part of their processes. "We began to deploy highly knowledgeable agronomists and crop specialists all over the country to run these sessions. These are now the people who are teaching the farmers while using the local dialects to ensure they understand. We are now running more than 100 classes/seminars nationwide."

The second was to introduce new digital information service platforms. Takashi explains that the business worked in

collaboration with the International Rice Research Institute to develop an app for smartphones called Rice Crop Manager. The aim of this unique software was to help the small-scale rice farmers determine the quantities of fertiliser they should use to produce the best yields.

"This is having a great impact," Takashi says. "Some farmers actually declare to me when I'm in the field that when they change their fertilisation system to use our products their yields are actually growing by up to 10 per cent. It can be very hard and it takes time but we know that we can contribute to making a difference through our classes and by implementing innovative technologies."

As the fourth CEO of Atlas, Takashi hopes to leave a legacy of success not only for the company but also for the Filipino farming community. He believes the foundations are now in place and,

although there are numerous challenges and adversities facing the business every day, Atlas is on the right track for a bright future. "Our vision is very easy if everybody understands it. We want to exist for at least another 50 or 60 years. We want to make it to 100 years—to be a century old. This can be difficult to do but we think that if we can communicate and innovate effectively we will get there. My aim is to be able to pass this company over to the next generation in sound condition. And ultimately, Atlas would like to play a role in making the Philippines a much better country to live in so that even the farmers' families can dream of a good life." ■

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- Ken Seitz, President and Chief Executive Officer, Canpotex Limited

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