

# Interview: Hector Carlos Autino

The president of AOCS' Latin American Section offers a fats and oils perspective from the region

**Eduardo Dubinsky**

**Q.** Tell us briefly about your background in the oils and fats industry.

**A.** From 1962 to 1978 I carried out different activities for Swift Company in the city of Rosario, Argentina, including working in the position of chemical lab analyst and heading the Edible and Non-edible Fats Rendering Area.

In 1978, I became production manager at the plant in San Jerónimo Sud currently owned by Bunge, about 35 kilometers (km) to the west of Rosario. My first responsibilities involved construction of that plant. I also participated in the plant's startup, and its multiple modifications, always in search of increased production capacity as well as operational efficiency. My activities at that facility continued until 2001. At that time, Bunge purchased the industrial and port complex that had belonged to the Swiss André Group, and I was transferred to that site as the plant's operations manager, remaining in the position until 2005. During that period, I took part in and authored many changes that made possible the complex's 8,000 metric tons (MT)/day crushing capacity, which helped it become one of the most efficient facilities in the country. The plant has GMP [Good Manufacturing Practice] B12 and ISO 9000 certifications, in addition to other management tools related to safety and environmental issues, which include TPM [total productive maintenance]-Kaizen.

From 2005 to the present, I have performed corporate tasks for Bunge at a global level. I have been in charge of many design and modification projects for different Bunge plants around the world, including Spain, Italy, India, China, Russia, Ukraine, Poland, and Brazil. Currently I am in charge of the construction of the new



*Hector Carlos Autino, president of AOCS' Latin American Section*

industrial plant that the company is building in the city of Ramallo, in the province of Buenos Aires, with a projected 5,000 MT/day crushing capacity.

**Q.** Briefly describe the growth of the Argentine oil industry.

**A.** The Argentine oil industry has shown a dramatic expansion, directly related to the growth that the country has experienced in the last 30 years. Argentina is the world's third-largest soybean producer and the world's largest soybean oil and meal exporter; it also holds key positions in the production of sunflower, peanut, and other oilseeds. This has caused the exponential growth of crushing capacity since 1980, currently above 150,000 MT/day, i.e., 45 million metric tons (MMT) per year.

Consequently, many Argentine facilities are the largest in their type at global level. Cargill, Bunge, Dreyfuss, Molinos, AGD, Nidera, Vicentín, and Buyatti are among the main actors within the industry. For example, there are facilities having a crushing capacity of 20,000 MT/day. All plants have a high level of automation

and state-of-the-art technology that makes them highly competitive and allows them to export to countless countries around the world (using the port complexes that are mainly located on the Paraná River). These complexes are highly efficient and capable of loading a Panamax vessel with 45,000 MT in only 24 hours. The complex is supported by an important waterway that is dredged and maintained to allow navigation of those vessels entering the Paraná River from the Río de la Plata and then back to the sea to reach countless international destinations.

The recent appearance of biofuels has positioned Argentina as an outstanding producer of biodiesel, with production that increased from 150,000 to 1,500,000 MT/year in less than two years; and this turns us into large exporters of renewable fuel, providing added value to our primary production.

**Q.** How do you see the current situation and the future for the oils and fats industry in Argentina?

**A.** Because of its industrial development and despite the world's economic crisis, Argentina will continue to export its agro-industrial production thanks to its high level of competitiveness. In addition, production diversity and the recent appearance of biofuels offer new tools for our country to efficiently defend its business. Although we are currently immersed in an unfavorable context, with economic turbulence at domestic and international levels, it is expected that such deviations will gradually cease, allowing Argentina to get back on course and to maintain the position of a strong and reliable food exporter based on the country's successful agro-industry.

**Q.** Considering all the traveling you do for your company, and its developments in other parts of the world, how do you compare the levels that Argentina has attained in its professional and research levels with the rest of the globe?

**A.** Argentina has especially promoted the introduction of technology into its agroindustry, whose growth requires well-trained professionals and specialists. This was possible thanks to the effort and enterprising spirit of the companies that strongly committed their assets to growth, coupled with the improvement of their human resources. Universities and technical schools also contributed, according to their abilities, to make this come true.

Today, Argentina has model facilities absolutely comparable with the best of their type at global level, and with high-level professional human resources, which are part of the converging aspects that promote the aforementioned growth and the success of our management.

**Q.** How significant was, and is, the appearance of ASAGA (Asociación Argentina de Grasas y Aceites) for our oils and fats specialty?

**A.** ASAGA was founded in 1989, spurred by the need to have an association that could bring together Argentinian technical people and professionals who were willing to work selflessly to spread the technical and scientific aspects of the specialty in question. From 1989 to date, ASAGA has organized more than 150

theoretical-practical courses to train and improve the knowledge of the individuals that work in the industries within our area; it has organized three Latin American congresses and is launching the organization of a fourth congress for 2009. In 1990, *A&G* magazine was created, and with a quarterly print run of 2,000 copies, *A&G* is the most important publication of its type in Latin America and among Spanish publications.

The association has developed and continues to develop numerous agreements with universities to achieve new and innovative contributions. The agreement signed with UCEL, the University of the Latin American Educational Center in Rosario, may be the most important one because it has promoted the installation of a small-scale pilot plant for oils and fats processing, as well as establishing a university technical degree and a master's, with specialization in edible oils and fats, for technical people and professionals in that educational center.

Because of facts like that, ASAGA's contribution has been, and continues to be, invaluable, and this can be confirmed and assessed by the entire industry, not only at a local level, but also at global level.

For myself, I can say that I have been and continue to be uninterruptedly linked to the association. I have been a part of the governing board and its president for a two-year period; from the beginning I have held the position of *pro bono* director of the official *A&G* publication. I have also been a lecturer at numerous training and congress events organized by ASAGA, and I feel strongly identified with this association, for which I hold a very special feeling.

**Q.** How do you manage to perform the multiplicity of tasks that you carry out—industrial manager for Bunge, *A&G* director, coordinator in the ASAGA-UCEL agreement, LA-AOCS president, and coordinator for the Latin American Congress—in such an efficient manner while still contributing to a large number of the relevant issues pertaining to ASAGA?

**A.** When one loves what he does, and feels identified and committed to his company and his colleagues, there is always time for doing things, although I must say that this takes up leisure and family time; luckily my wife and my children have always been supportive of my work, and this not only invigorates my spirit, but also gives me the strength to carry out work that cannot be declined. With the sole exception of my position at Bunge, the rest of my activity is *pro bono* and this reflects my spirit of being helpful to my colleagues with the intention of giving back all the esteem and contributions they have granted me throughout my professional career within this industry.

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Look for part two of this interview in next month's issue of *inform*.

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Eduardo Dubinsky, of Eng.E.Dubinsky & Assoc.—Technical Consultants (Buenos Aires, Argentina), is a contributing editor to *inform* magazine. E-mail him at [edubinsky@ciudad.com.ar](mailto:edubinsky@ciudad.com.ar).