



Pacific Fish Processing Co (PFP), a producer of frozen and processed seafood, wants the new government to make solving the serious labour shortage in the food industry its top priority.

President Thawee Piyapatana said the food industry needed at least one million more workers nationwide.

As it is now, several food processors cannot expand their businesses or increase production capacity.

"I want to see the new government make a serious effort to address this issue. It should speed up registration of alien workers so that seafood plants and other food factories can hire them legally," said Mr Thawee.

He said PFP had only 200 labourers. To deal with its own shortage, it extends work hours and pays overtime.

The new government should also adjust the wage structure to reflect real economic conditions, said Mr Thawee.

As well, a special fiscal budget should be earmarked to subsidise electricity for a wider group of users rather than offering free power only to households consuming less than 90 units.

Mr Thawee suggests the government help enhance Thais' knowledge and skills in order to increase the country's attractiveness once the Asean Economic Community kicks off in 2015.

"The government should reform the whole education system and promote human resource development. This is crucial for Thailand's long-term competitiveness," he said.

Thai food exports are expected to generate revenue of US\$23.8 billion this year, up by 8% from last year.

For its business plan, PFP has postponed construction of a 200-million-baht factory in Indonesia until next year.

The company's foreign partners are seeking a new location for the plant, one that will be safe from natural disasters. It will be on Java between Jakarta and Surabaya.

PFP is targeting sales of 4.1 billion baht this year, up by 15% from last year. Of that, most or 2.2 billion baht will come from exports.

The projected growth remains in line with earlier expectations. PFP's foreign operations remain positive despite sales of its surimi or frozen minced fish meat falling by 20% in the wake of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

The company will offset the decline in Japanese sales with expected huge growth in China and Malaysia.

Mr Thawee said PFP has spent more than 300 million baht on new machinery and other factory improvements and 100 million baht for a chilled facility, all aimed at supporting expansion over the next three years.

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