

Company Name: Herdez
 Company Ticker: HERDEZ* MM
 Date: 2015-02-27
 Event Description: Y 2014 Earnings Call

Market Cap: 16,048.80
 Current PX: 37.15
 YTD Change(\$): +1.71
 YTD Change(%): +4.825

Bloomberg Estimates - EPS
 Current Quarter: N.A.
 Current Year: 1.915
 Bloomberg Estimates - Sales
 Current Quarter: N.A.
 Current Year: 15020.833

Y 2014 Earnings Call

Company Participants

- Andrea Amozurrutia, Head of Financial Planning and Investor Relations
- Gerardo Canavati, Chief Financial Officer

Other Participants

- Unidentified Participant
- Luis Miranda, Analyst

Presentation

Operator

Good morning everyone and welcome to Grupo Herdez fourth quarter 2014 results conference. Before we begin, I would like to remind you that this call is being recorded and that information discussed today may include forward-looking statements regarding the company's financial and operating performance. All projections are subject to risks and uncertainties and actual results may differ materially. Please refer to the detailed note in the company's press release regarding forward-looking statements.

I will now like to turn the call over to Mr. Gerardo Canavati, the company's Chief Financial Officer and Ms. Andrea Amozurrutia, Head of Financial Planning and Investor Relations.

Gerardo Canavati, Chief Financial Officer

Good morning everyone and thank you for joining us. We are pleased to report the strong fourth quarter to bring this year to a close, which is in fact the historic year. A 100th anniversary of our company. Andrea will provide an overview of our performance in the period. And then, I will share with you some additional information on Nutrisa, our financial position and of course some insights into our expectations for 2015.

As usual, we'll be happy to take any questions you may have at the end.

Andrea Amozurrutia, Head of Financial Planning and Investor Relations

Thank you, Gerardo. For the second quarter in role, we saw our commercial efforts drives volume and sales growth. Well, there are some signs of an essence recovery in growth and re-consumption. We largely credit our internal efforts and more integrated execution across the business for a stronger sales. Solid topline growth performance combined with the favorable raw materials environment, help generate significant margin expansion in the period.

Looking our performance by segments. In Mexico core, there were five categories within our power brands that saw double digit sales growth like mayo, pasta, tomato puree, spices and tea. Like conference, the categories with single digit growth are relatively flat performance where jam, canned vegetables, mole and tuna. As a results, net sales growth for the quarter in Mexico core was 11.4%. On the export front, sales were down about 8% primarily because of inventory adjustments of MegaMex. At Nutrisa, sales were 11.6% lower in the quarter reflecting the downsizing of the product portfolio that has been underway in Q2, as well as weak store traffic.

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Well, we have hoped for an update over the holidays, it's seems discretionary consumer spending in specialized retail has yet to recover. Not just for Nutrisa, but overall in Mexico. In terms of gross margin, we saw a major expansion this quarter of seven percentage points. These resulted from the combination of its front topline growth, a better sales mix and lower prices on key raw material when compared to last year, particularly soybean oil and wheat.

Additionally, our hedging strategy limited the impact of the stronger US dollar towards the end of the year. Operating performance, consolidated EBIT margin before other income and expenses expanded more than six percentage points in the quarter to 17.9%. These reflects gross margin expansion that more than offset the 16 million pesos of extraordinary cost and expenses of Nutrisa. Other expenses this quarter included 12 million pesos to conclude the consolidation of the manufacturing facilities in Don Miguel [ph] and 12 million pesos at Nutrisa.

Despite these one-time charges it is grew 67% while the margin expanded 5.4 percentage points to 17.6%. In terms of the EBITDA it grows 35% and the margin expanded 3.8 percentage point to a strong 19.2%. For the equity investment in our project which is primarily the pre-tax income of MegaMax, excluding the earn out portion that we recognized in the fourth quarter of 2013. Equity would have increased by more than 12% reflecting improved results particularly in the Guacamole business towards the end of the year.

Finally, at the bottom line, consolidated net income totaled 485 million pesos in the quarter with a margin of 11.9%. We achieved 7.3 percentage points higher than in the year ago period. Majority net income grew 73 million to 225. For the full year net sales growth was 8.6%. Well, operating profits and EBITDA grew 20% and 18% respectively. EBITDA margin closed slightly above the long-term sustainable level of 16%, 17% that we have discussed with all of you.

Lastly, net consolidated income grew at a double digit phase to 1.5 billion pesos. In terms of our financial position, the cash balance at the year-end were almost 2.5 billion pesos of which 1 billion came from the November 2014 bond issuance and which has already been used to refinance short-term credit loans and bonds of 200 million pesos and 600 million pesos respectively. Consolidated equity increased almost 9% while the adjusted ROE reached 17.9%. A level not seen in the past five years.

With that, I will now turn the call over to Gerardo.

Gerardo Canavati, Chief Financial Officer

Thank you, Andrea. We were pleased to see continued solid performance in our core business, which came in the context of a moderate recovery in the consumption environment in the back half of 2014, coupled with focus commercial execution. This means we are entering 2015 with a stronger foodings. As for Nutrisa we have talked with you at some length about the restructuring process in 2014 we saw some of that business. So I won't elaborate too much more today. The bulk of the restructuring expenses are behind it, we're making good progress installing the new brand vision of health and wellness.

Our new management team is in place. The portfolio has been significantly rebound and our retail store network has already been optimized with the closure of 42 underperforming stores and 53 new openings during 2014. The gap is closing in terms of same-store sales, but it won't be until the second quarter that we'll see fair comps. There is still significant work to do in brand architecture and in the product portfolio. A bright spot for the year was the 10% rise in the float in (inaudible) average ticket.

We are confident that we have built a solid base to unleash the potential of this business, both top line and in terms of profitability. And that we'll capture our share of wallet once consumer confidence improve. In terms of MegaMax, we are underlying business recovered towards the end of the year. We saw double-digit growth in new lines like minus and organic guacamole and we standardize the situation that begins. We continue to see increased penetration of our brands among US house hold and anticipate that the efforts made as of the end -- of course of the year will help drive growth going forward.

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Another bright spot for the quarter was strong cash flow generation, which increased more than 300 million pesos after share buyback. That coupled with strong operating results brought our leverage ratios of net debt to consolidated EBITDA to 1.4 times significantly below the 2013 level, as well as the third quarter ratio. During 2014 consolidated cash flow from operations reached 1.6 billion, while free cash flow was 1 billion pesos. As for 2015, we see a moderately upbeat environment despite the headwinds for the pesos, which by the way are forcing us to anticipate some price actions to offset higher input cost. We expect Mexico core sales to increase at a mid-to high-single digit range. One of our more ambitious commercial initiatives in this year. We will be the roll out of McCormick chicken volume. It's a large category that is currently dominated by one single participant, but we believe that McCormick brand as the global leader in (inaudible) has the strength to be relevant in this category, which is the most important seasoning in Mexico.

We were of course continue to develop and innovating in other categories and brands as well. At the operating level, we expect profit margins to remain relatively stable. Net earnings should grow at mid double-digits phase and we will clearly focused on leveraging our prior investment and maintaining strict financial discipline in order to reduce the company's total debt Even considering the pending acquisition of Nestle ice-cream -- as for Nutrisa, we should see top line growth in the mid to high-teen with a significant recovery in margin. We intend to keep the pace of store openings around 60 stores per year. At MegaMax we estimate double digit growth in its pre-tax income, which we will capture our equity in associated line.

Exports should increase high single digits based on a stronger dollar. Our CapEx for 2015 is budgeted in the 1 billion peso range and will be allocated to the following investments. A new tuna vessel, a new distribution center in Los Mochis, investment in technology and information and Nutrisa new store openings and few store revamps. As for Nestle's Mexico ice cream assets we expect the deal to close shortly. This pending acquisition will be a strong complement to Nutrisa in terms of scale portfolios segment, innovation and channel reach. In fact our frozen division which will include both businesses will become the second largest category for Herdez's Amozurrutia.

Accounting for over 15% of the Group's net sale and we will become the second in the industry. We expect synergies to come mainly in fixed cost in manufacturing and distribution, which represent more than 12% of the combined cash flow. However this synergies will be in post integration, meaning we'll capture them in 2016. For 2015, the current year, the pending acquisition will be gross cash flow accretive.

That concludes my prepared remarks this morning. So we are now ready to take your questions.

Questions And Answers

Operator

(Operator Instructions) And we'll go first to Richard (inaudible).

Unidentified Participant

Hi. Good morning. Would you be able to go through the guidance for me again, I got some of it, but I didn't get all of it.

Gerardo Canavati, Chief Financial Officer

So for Mexico core sales we are expecting them to increase at a mid to high-single digit rate. At the operating level we expect profit margins to remain relatively stable. Net earnings should grow at a mid-double-digit pace. And Nutrisa should grow top line growth in the mid to high single, turning to high teen, mid to high teen with a significant recovery in margins. We intend to open 60 stores this year.

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MegaMax we estimate double-digit growth in its pre-tax income. Export should increase high single digits based on a stronger dollar. And the CapEx will be around 1 billion pesos.

Unidentified Participant

Okay. Can you go into -- what makes you as optimistic because you are as far the sales environment, I know there is been something that a lot of us has been waiting for a recovery in a consumer environment in Mexico and based on that guidance you expect to see consumer to emerge somewhat domestically. Can you maybe just add some more detail around that or what you're saying and what's your thoughts are.

Gerardo Canavati, Chief Financial Officer

Sure. Well, first Richard we've seen a little bit of recoveries in the third quarter, it can be called -- in the third quarter. We saw some volume increases, we saw the same in fourth quarter and in the start of this year is also strong. So the basis of our expectations are in two fronts. One would be the fiscal reform asset, the effects of the fiscal reform that will almost more than one year. Your counts are better. And second we have increased our focus in our commercial strategy. Since the second half of last year. So we have built more asserted and we are increasing our investments in point of sales. So we feel very confident that with moderate recovery towards our execution we can deliver those results.

Obviously, our increasing sale is a combination of volume growth and price action that will be in place in second quarter.

Unidentified Participant

Okay, thank you.

Andrea Amozurrutia, Head of Financial Planning and Investor Relations

We estimate that from the total sales growth of our two or three points will come from pricing and the rest from volume growth.

Unidentified Participant

Volume growth, okay.

Gerardo Canavati, Chief Financial Officer

Okay. Thank you.

Operator

(Operator Instructions) And we'll go next Luis Miranda with Santander.

Luis Miranda, Analyst

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Hi, -- good morning. I know if you could give us some color just on the thing you're passing strategy and you mention these year would just offset the FX little bit and should we take elder to be one time increase during the first half or during the first quarter. And also could you give us some word, in terms of, are you being price or as far now are you moving just in line with some competitors. And my second question with regards to Nutrisa. These stores opening 360 store that you are mentioning are net additions and do you plan to have some further shut down are in the year. Thank you.

Gerardo Canavati, Chief Financial Officer

Okay. In terms of pricing Luis, we would say that there is no question that we have an impact in input costs. There are like to, there are dollar denominated. So we are very focused on just having some presenting some price increases or they are needed. We are not increasing the whole portfolio. Specifically, in one category that has raw material, significant change would be wheat. Where the government change the rules how we buy wheat for the whole industry. So coupled with that those changes plus the exchange rate, we are seeing raw material increases more than 25%. So in that category particularly we will be more aggressive same as the industry as we understand.

Obviously we will take some time to the market to effect those -- effective increases, but we don't see any choice. The other categories that we will -- poor price increase that it would in the low single digit. And this only are because of the stronger dollar. Regarding your second question about Nutrisa openings.

Unidentified Participant

Yes.

Gerardo Canavati, Chief Financial Officer

Can you refresh that --.

Unidentified Participant

No. Basically you are talking about this -- the stores opening, 60 stores, I heard correctly. Is it net opening or should we be expect this number to be in ne lower with some closings.

Gerardo Canavati, Chief Financial Officer

No, we think that we are the majority of our closure has been done. We may have one or two stores, but it's not significant. So our goal of opening 60 would be net of closures.

Unidentified Participant

Perfect. Thank you very much.

Operator

We will go next to the (inaudible).

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Unidentified Participant

Hello, everyone. (inaudible) about this earning out that happen to MagaMax during 2013. I just want to know that it's going to happen again, what is the religious (inaudible).

Gerardo Canavati, Chief Financial Officer

Good morning. Can you repeat the question please.

Unidentified Participant

Yes. I still want to know what is the earning out that happed with MegaMax during 2013. And is that event is going to happen again.

Gerardo Canavati, Chief Financial Officer

No. The answer is, no. The earn out is a one-time event because we already integrated to the -- we are in the process of integrating the company, but earn out was an agreement with the prior sellers and the prior management. So it will not it will not happen again, one time effect.

Unidentified Participant

All right. Thank you.

Operator

And our next question comes from (inaudible).

Unidentified Participant

Hello, Gerardo and Andrea, this is (inaudible) First of all congratulations on the results and we just like to know if you can, if you expect margins in Mexico witnesses this quarter are sustainable going forward or if we should expect some contraction in the next -- in 2015.

Gerardo Canavati, Chief Financial Officer

Well, good morning. Our guidance for margins for the whole year, we do not provide guidance for the quarter. So for the whole year you can expect between '14 -- you can expect between '16 and '17 that would be our range. So that will be our sustainable range in terms of margin.

Unidentified Participant

Great. That's very helpful. Thank you.

Operator

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And we have no more questions. And finally, we do have a later question in queue, we will go (inaudible) from Credit Suisse.

Unidentified Participant

Hi, good morning to everyone. I would like to know, given the Mexican pesos depreciation, what should we expect in terms of prices in 2014.

Gerardo Canavati, Chief Financial Officer

Good morning, Santiago. We already addressed that question, we are going to take some price actions in some categories we are needed related to dollar denominated, that will be in the single digit increase and they will come in the next month. And it will not apply to all our portfolio.

Unidentified Participant

Thank you very much. That was very helpful. Thank you.

Operator

And with no more questions in queue. I'd like to turn the call back to Gerardo Canavati for closing remarks.

Gerardo Canavati, Chief Financial Officer

Well, thank you very much to participate in this conference call. As usual, we would like to hear if you have any further questions. And we will be in touch for the next call. Have a good day. Thank you, Jill.

Operator

My pleasure. This concludes today's call. Have a wonderful day.

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