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Like the rest of the MENA region, Kuwait's food and beverage industry has adapted to massive change in the face of COVID-19. Hodema spoke to Dana Tareq Al Mutawa, managing partner at Acquire General Trading and Contracting (AGTC), to learn more about how the company has overcome the challenges.

- **Can you tell us about your food and beverage brands within Acquire General Trading and Contracting (AGTC)?**



Acquire is a privately owned food and beverage company that operates Munch, Upper Crust Pizzeria, Re Cleanse and Rare Cuts.

- **How do you perceive the healthy value chain in Kuwait from farming to end consumer?**

I'm seeing real interest and growth between farms and restaurants collaborating to create seasonal menus that feature more local ingredients. The best part is witnessing brands evolve and change their identity to become more "local."

- **In your opinion, when did the healthy food and beverage trend start in Kuwait? Is there any specificity for this trend in the country?**

As a country that went through the 1990 invasion, we saw a huge turn in the food and beverage industry. We went from local restaurants to commercial, international franchises that were mostly in the fast food and casual dining segments. The trend of US franchises held strong for 25 years, and I would say that since around 2015, the trend started to shift with more local chefs coming back to Kuwait and starting new local brands. This trend is

actually a global one. We see juice bars and organic shops as well popping up all over the world.

- **What are the challenges of operating a franchise compared to a homegrown concept?**

It's all about local flavor. With a homegrown concept, you have the flexibility to move and adapt very quickly to trends that occur in your own country. With a franchise, you don't have that flexibility. The process to develop and change the menu is tiresome and could take weeks or even months to be approved by the franchisor.

- **What was the effect of COVID-19 on your businesses, and what measures have you put in place to minimize its impact?**

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Unfortunately, COVID-19 has affected everyone on a global level. Kuwait went into a full lockdown from May 10 to 30, followed by a partial lockdown with a curfew starting at 6 pm daily. Food and beverage companies were not allowed to operate except for delivery or take away. This mental shift of trusting where your food comes from is something we believe will stay for a while. We

are working closely with our customers to listen to what they want, and adhering to governmental policies and rules in order to offer packages that can be taken home and cooked. For example, we introduced fruits and vegetables from our juice shop, which we never did before. We created marinated cuts of meat and chicken ready for cooking or grilling from our butchery.

- **What are your future plans?**

The plan is to stay focused and to keep our team safe and healthy. We have set measures for contactless delivery, no cash, and a no-walk-in policy for our outlets. We believe that we need to develop much faster, create packages and keep it new and interesting for our clients. It's going to be a tough time for everyone. Companies are counting on the support of operators, landlords and customers during these difficult weeks and months to be able to remain open and survive this pandemic.



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