



# Trends in Soaps and Detergents in the Arab World<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Trends in the soap and detergent industry in the Arab world are discussed. Many new plants are being planned and installed for many of the products which are now being imported. Opportunities for joint ventures are suggested.

To complete the picture of soap and detergent trends in the world, I would like to comment on trends in the Arab world. The data I am giving have been estimated only from my experiences in the soap and detergent field.

The Arab world extends from Morocco and Moritania in the west to Iraq and the Arabian Gulf in the east, and from Syria, Iraq, and the southern part of the Mediterranean Sea in the north to Sudan and Somalia in the south.

Thus the climatic conditions vary from cold in the north to hot and very hot in semi-tropical and tropical places, with sunshine 365 days in most of the places.

All washing methods are used in the Arab world. Hand washing in the tepid ambient temperature or cold is the predominant practice where women would do their washing using bar soap at home or on the canal or river banks. Boiling of the wash in a kettle is very common in most of the Arab countries. Simple electric washing machines are the types which are most widespread in countries like Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Jordan. These machines are not expensive and high-foam detergents are used in them without any problem. Sophisticated, fully automatic types are used more in the most oil-rich countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and in Lebanon. However, these are increasing in use in most Arab countries. These types of machines need low-foam detergents.

The Arab world has about 140 million inhabitants. In 1976 the total production of soaps and detergents was estimated to be 630,000 tons. Of these, 180,000 tons were detergents and 450,000 tons were soaps. About 40% (180,000 tons) of the soaps produced in the Arab countries were made in Egypt. When taking into consideration the contracted detergent plants in the Arab world, which are now under construction or which will start construction within a year's time and which will start production by 1981, the total capacity of the powdered detergents in the Arab world in 1981 should reach a total capacity of 550,000 tons per year. It is possible that some of the old plants would be closed down; however, this will depend on the market situation of the particular country. Although all the Arab countries are installing new detergent plants, out of the 370,000 tons of new detergent plants' capacity contracted, Algeria is installing new plants with a total capacity of over 200,000 tons of powdered detergents annually. This represents over 50% of all the new contracted plants' capacity. Egypt comes next as it is erecting new plants having an annual capacity of about 60,000 tons. Algeria has been importing large quantities of ready-made detergents from Europe in the past few years.

The increase in the soap industry is expected to be less than that of detergent, but it is estimated to increase with a

capacity of about 100,000 tons, so that the total annual capacity for soap production will reach 550,000 tons by 1981. This will raise the total capacity to 1.1 million tons of soaps and detergents in 1981 in the Arab world.

Theoretically, most essential ingredients of detergent raw materials or the raw materials themselves are present in the Arab world. Yet most raw materials for both soaps and detergents are imported to the Arab world:

1. Tallow — as used in soap is totally imported.
2. Alkylbenzene — in spite of the fact that the Arab world produces almost one third of world oil, all the alkylbenzene is imported. Projects for the production of LAB are under consideration or are at the study stage in some countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Algeria. Both DDB and LAB are used in all Arab countries.
3. Fatty alcohol — produced in Egypt from natural fats and oils in small quantities by hydrogenolysis.
4. Sodium tripolyphosphate — rock phosphate is abundant in most Arab countries and is exported or used to manufacture super-phosphate. A limited quantity of sodium tripolyphosphate is produced in Tunisia, but so far it has not reached any Arab country outside Tunisia. Iraq is installing a sodium tripolyphosphate plant which is expected to start production in about 1980. In any event, sodium tripolyphosphate is imported to the Arab countries and will continue so for the coming few years until new plants are installed.
5. Sodium sulfate — both Egypt and Iraq produce sodium sulfate, but the production is less than demand. Thus, sodium sulfate is imported to all Arab countries. Egypt is installing two new plants which will raise its production to 40,000 tons of anhydrous sodium sulfate by 1979.
6. Sodium silicate — most of the countries import sodium silicate except Egypt who produces it.
7. Sodium carbonate — produced in Egypt by the Solvay process.
8. Sodium toluene sulfonate — Egypt produces it and exports some to other Arab countries.
9. Caustic soda, sulfonic acid, and oleum — produced in several Arab countries.
10. Carboxymethyl cellulose, optical brighteners, and sodium perborate — all imported.

Many developments in the soap and detergent industry in the Arab world will occur during the next few years. New detergent plants will start production in 1978, but others will follow in the years to come. In order to fulfill the big demand for raw materials, it will be necessary to install new plants for manufacture of basic raw materials like alkylbenzene, sodium tripolyphosphate, sodium carbonate, and sodium silicate. Thus there is a good chance for joint venture projects to install plants for the production of these products. International companies with modern technology can cooperate with Arab investors, whether private or governmental, in these projects as the market potentiality of these products is big and sure in this part of the world. Moreover the abundant availability of cheap, skilled and semiskilled labor, and other manpower in highly populated countries like Egypt and other countries makes joint venture projects very attractive.

<sup>1</sup>Not presented during plenary sessions.