

Under-fire Indian shrimp firm Choice to open new factory

The Indian shrimp packer ended its lease of a factory in Amalapuram in March, which it had been occupying while it waited for the new Bapatla plant to be built

By [Dan Gibson](#) | April 11, 2024 10:44 BST



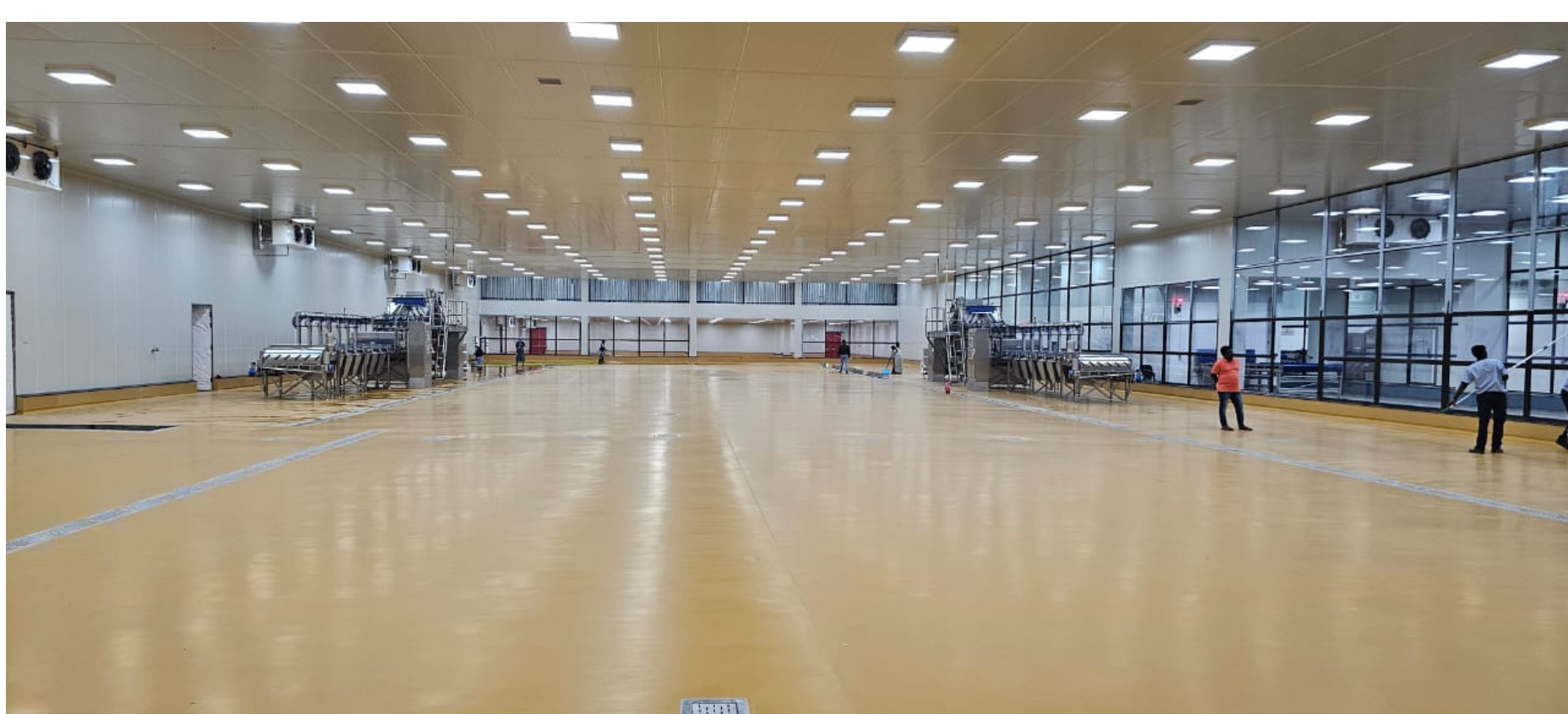
□ The overhead view of Choice Canning's Bapatla factory in March 2024. Credit: Choice Canning

India's Choice Canning Company, a shrimp processing subsidiary of The Choice Group, is moving south to a new "state-of-the-art" facility in May, it confirmed to *Undercurrent News*.

The processor has recently attracted significant US scrutiny after former general factory manager turned whistleblower, Joshua Farinella, made allegations that it had been responsible for instances of labor abuse, antibiotic fraud and deliberately misleading auditors at its factory in Amalapuram, Andhra Pradesh. Choice Canning has strongly denied these claims.

The firm had been leasing that factory, which had an annual capacity to produce 17 million pounds -- roughly 7,700 metric tons -- of shrimp products, since June 2022. This lease expired in March.

In the meantime, Choice has been constructing a new shrimp processing facility further south at Bapatla, near Nellore, since November 2022, it told *Undercurrent*. The new 200,000-square-foot plant has double the annual capacity of the Amalapuram site, with the potential to produce roughly 16,000t of shrimp products annually.



□ Inside Choice Canning's new Bapatla factory as machinery is installed in March. Credit: Choice Canning

"It's all for the US," Jacob Jose, Choice Canning's vice president of sales and marketing, confirmed to *Undercurrent*. "It's an extension of our current product line doing everything: cooked, raw and value-added."

He explained that roughly 75% of Choice's current sales come from its own products, with 25% bought from other factories around the world. "Obviously, our objective is to produce more of our own."

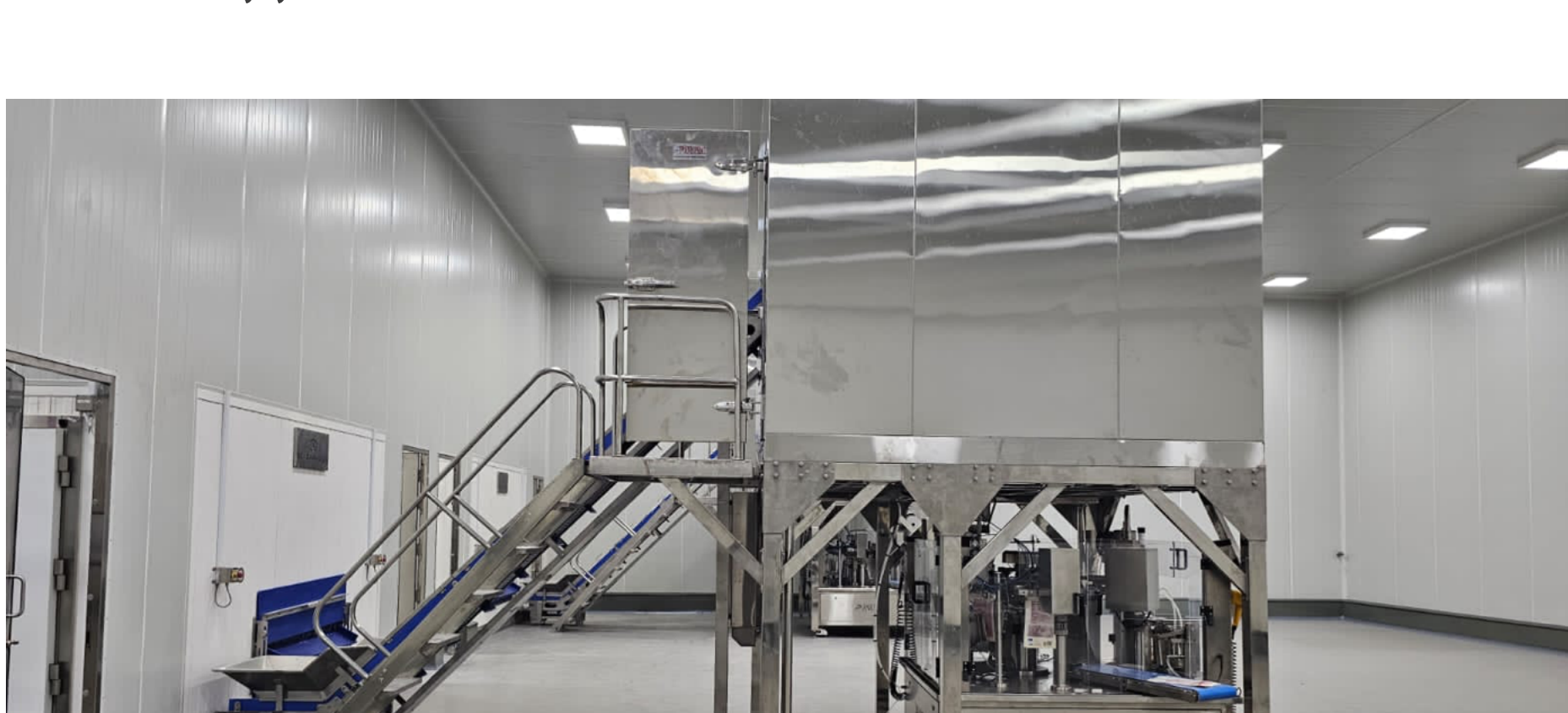
Choice's first factory, in Kochi, Kerala, was converted to breaded products only in 2022, he said, which meant the firm needed a new plant to continue its other product lines. The Amalapuram plant was leased to fill the gap while it constructed the new facility.

"We're just replacing our original plant; that went into breadding, so we built this plant to take over our existing volume," Jose told *Undercurrent*. "There is additional production capacity -- when you build a new plant, you take that into account if you need more tomorrow -- but the main thing is the technology and time that's gone into it."

Jose said the Bapatla site will take roughly a month to trial and go through certification processes but will be ready for full-scale production from June onwards.

"And it's not just bigger, there's a lot more optimization too. A lot more automation of peeling, a new packing line, streamlined processes and a lot of conveyors. We don't want any stagnant water, with moving conveyors you avoid that so you can keep hygiene and quality at the highest possible level."

While the factory will produce some small volumes of black tiger, its main product will overwhelmingly be vannamei, situated as it is in the heart of Andhra Pradesh; the state produces more than 70% of India's total vannamei export volume every year.



□ The Bapatla factory is set to begin operations in May. Credit: Choice Canning

Farinella left before assuming Bapatla role

Both Farinella and Jose confirmed to *Undercurrent* that the former general manager had been hired to run the new Bapatla plant, with a settling-in period at the Amalapuram site aimed to give him a chance to get acclimatized to the new post after joining at the end of October 2023.

However, Farinella said he had been told the Bapatla factory would be ready by January.

"I understand that with any new construction, there are always some sort of delays, but I was told I'd be at the Amalapuram factory for maybe a month and then moved to the new factory," he said to *Undercurrent*.

Regarding his allegations about conditions at the Amalapuram plant, Farinella neither confirmed nor denied whether he felt the Bapatla plant would represent an improvement.

"As far as the working environment in the factory itself, there was never much of an issue. The only thing I would question is the migrant workers, because it's still the same migrant workers coming from the Amalapuram factory down to work at the Bapatla factory."

Although the Bapatla factory was still under construction when he left the firm in February, Farinella said he felt the accommodation quality at the new plant "would have to be a little better, as it's new."

For his part, Jose described the new plant as having "a state-of-the-art dormitory, fully air-conditioned [rooms], and a huge in-house cafeteria and kitchen."

"I wouldn't use the word 'hotel,' but it's built to the highest standards possible."

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