

# Canada's lentil king wins EY World Entrepreneur Of The Year award

| BY KO DING WEI |

**M**urad Al-Katib, who started a company that is now one the world's largest suppliers of pulses, has been crowned this year's EY World Entrepreneur Of The Year (WEOY). Murad, president and CEO of AGT Food and Ingredients, edged out 58 other competitors from 49 countries at the annual event in Monaco held to celebrate entrepreneurship.

AGT, based in Regina, Saskatchewan and listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange, was started in 2003 and, today, accounts for about a quarter of the world trade in lentils. The company generates more than US\$1.49 billion (\$2.04 billion) in annual revenues.

Murad, the son of Turkish immigrants, oversees more than 2,000 employees in five continents. His company's operations include 46 factories and a trading business covering more than 120 countries. He has also devoted time to the causes of food security, famine food aid and emergency refugee food response. He has delivered over four million family ration cartons to international agencies for Syrian refugees.

In his acceptance speech at the WEOY awards ceremony in Monaco on June 10, Murad highlighted the fact that the food industry has a great responsibility in the face of a burgeoning global population. "We need to change the way we produce food in the world [to feed everyone]. We need to change agriculture, we need to recognise that the environment needs to be protected, [and] we need to recognise that protein needs to be available to the world," he says. "The thing that I have really taken away from this week is that [being] entrepreneurs — we are the solutions."

"By taking risks and rethinking the approach to my industry, we have grown the business responsibly and transformed Canada's agricultural industry," he adds.

Before founding AGT, Murad had

a steady government job. But in 2001, when his wife was six months pregnant with twins, he quit to start a lentil business in the basement of his house. His enterprise grew, riding on the growing demand for protein in the emerging markets, and supported by the desire of Canadian farmers to diversify their crops.

AGT, which has since diversified into other food products — such as pasta, rice, varieties of grains, food ingredients, protein and fibre products — has been increasing revenue by an average of more than US\$100 million each year for the past five years. The company has grown organically, as well as through 17 strategic acquisitions in seven years, many of them in emerging markets.

Bryan Pearce, an EY global leader for EOY and Venture Capital Advisory, says the judges appreciated how Murad revolutionised the Canadian agricultural industry's supply chain by creating a direct connection between agricultural producers and the world.

Murad was the unanimous choice of the WEOY judging panel this year, says panel chairman Jim Nixon, who is also chairman and CEO of Nixon Energy Investments. "Murad is an incredible entrepreneur who has demonstrated outstanding value creation, organisational reach and expansion. Through sustainable agricultural practices, he is making a positive impact on the global environment," Nixon says.

The WEOY event, held from June 7 to 11, was a culmination of more than a year's efforts to recognise businessmen worldwide who are inspiring others with their vision, leadership and achievements.

Among the contenders for this year's award was David Low, who had won the category award for Manufacturing Supply Chain in Singapore's 2016 EY EOY campaign. Low is CEO of Futuristic Store Fixtures, which specialises in customised furniture and fixtures for retailers. It counts major global



Murad at the EY World Entrepreneur Of The Year awards gala

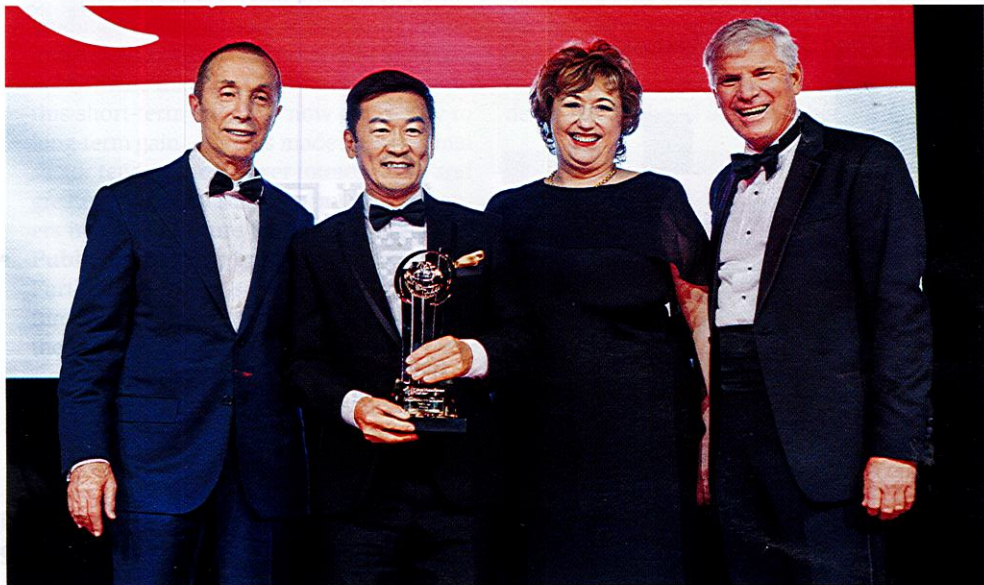
names such as H&M, Victoria's Secret and Guess as customers.

For Low, clinching the EOY trophy was a recognition of his decades of hard work. He did not have much formal education as a child, as his father made him help out at the family's factory. "I was told to do anything: furniture, painting, dismantling, anything. Immediately after school from noon until midnight, I was free labour. That shortened my childhood," he recalls.

In 1979, at the age of 18, Low joined his uncle and aunt at their interior contracting design business. There, he became more aware of his lack of education after finding it difficult to communicate with interior designers who spoke English. "What are you going to do? I learn," he says. "And I've been learning for the past 37 years."



EY managing partner of Asean and Singapore Max Loh (left) congratulating Low, Singapore's EY Entrepreneur Of The Year



From left: EY World Entrepreneur Of The Year 2016 and Moose Enterprise Holdings & Controlled Entities (Australia) chairman and co-CEO Manny Stul, Low, Trafalgar Entertainment Group director and EY World Entrepreneur Of The Year 2017 judge Rosemary Squire and Pearce at the EY World Entrepreneur Of The Year awards gala



The Singapore delegation at the EY World Entrepreneur Of The Year awards gala