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have to eat and we can be their kitchen."

The group has already expanded into trade and outsourcing in 30 countries. The network will encourage the group's business, particularly in the food sector, and set it up to become the "Kitchen of the World" with a focus on food safety. Dhanin announced the idea seven years ago.

Foreseeing the country's strength, his policy has become top of the government's national agenda to generate economic growth in the long run. Developing step by step, the group has not only focused on the farm sector but also on services to ensure Thailand's competitiveness at a time of rapid global change.

Dhanin is one of the Chearavanont family's key management advisers when it comes to Thai and overseas investments. A mix of modern and old-style management has facilitated the group's access to various markets. The CP Group's focus is on 10 key businesses that include seeds, fertiliser and plant protection, agro-industry and food, international trading, marketing and distribution, petrochemicals, real estate, telecommunications, automotive and industrial products, crop integration and the pet business.

CP Group reports average annual sales of more than US\$14 billion (Bt534 billion), with 250,000 employees worldwide. It has invested in 11 major strategic countries, including China and India, and carries out trade with another 30 countries.

Of its total sales, almost 70 per cent comes from its core agro-business group. This group's feed business is ranked as the world's biggest animal-feed producer with an annual production of 16.5 million tonnes manufactured in places such as Thailand, China, India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Burma and Turkey. Its broilers produce more than 30 million chickens per week.

In compliance with its food-safety policy, CP's Bt7-billion investment complex is the biggest chicken integration manufacturing plant in Asia. Inside there is a feed mill, a parent chicken breed farm, a



The conglomerate

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chicken farm with an evaporative cooling system and a computer control system, slaughterhouse and processing lines. The modern computer control system will allow the group 24-hour monitoring of the farm. In addition, it will be easy to tackle any widespread disease, such as the bird-flu virus.

With long-term vision, Dhanin has been instrumental in turning his family into a professional business by inviting experts in each area, both at home and overseas, to support its endeavours. As a result, the strategy has encouraged CP to enter diversified businesses, particularly telecommunications, retail and other services. Dhanin hopes to become the Wal Mart of Asia. As part of the dream, the group's convenience store chain, 7-Eleven, now has 3,477 stores in Thailand and 69 Lotus Supercentre stores in China. Both businesses are expanding fast.

Despite the regional financial crisis in 1997, CP decided to sell big lot shares in its retail business, Tesco-Lotus, making the group a minor shareholder. The management was to oversee the group's operation and ensure shareholders' benefits. The restructuring also included the consolidation of 11 companies into Charoen Pokphand Foods Plc in a bid to satisfy shareholders.

During this difficult time, many leading and small Thai companies had to shut down operations because of mismanagement, but CP undertook restructuring to maintain all core businesses for survival. The group formed alliances with world-leading partners such as Tesco and 7-Eleven. The tie-up with the Germany-based insurer Allianz AG has allowed the group access to technology and modern management.

Dhanin's vision is to supply good food for consumption and brain food through information technology and the Internet. "I am satisfied and happy with any success that can be achieved in one day only. We have to make ourselves dynamic," Dhanin said.

Despite being ranked as Asia's biggest agro-business conglomerate, Dhanin has never stopped thinking of developing further strategies to keep the group at the top. ■