

Europe
North America
Latin America
Asia-Pacific

Award winners | Europe | **France**

Denis Lambert

The LDC Group

The LDC Group is one of Europe's biggest poultry companies, employing more than 18,000 people. It is also a family business. In fact, a multifamily business, as it is owned by four families. Denis Lambert, second-generation family member and Chairman and CEO of LDC, has been pivotal to its success. Since he joined the business in the early 1980s, Denis has overseen tremendous growth. A great believer in the family business tradition, Denis says a big part of LDC's success is its adherence to stakeholder values.





“Employees want to see family members involved. This reassures them and ultimately motivates them.”

Denis Lambert,
Chairman and CEO,
The LDC Group

If there is one sporting achievement that could best describe running a family business, perhaps it would be the marathon. Both are about the long term, and both can be excruciatingly difficult and hugely rewarding in equal measure. Indeed, they are both about endurance.

Denis Lambert might appreciate the analogy. He is the Chairman and CEO of a family business called the LDC Group. He also runs marathons. Denis has been running one marathon a year for the past 20 years. And, during much of that time, he has also been LDC's top manager.

As CEO, Denis has overseen a big expansion in LDC, not only as a business but also as a family business, as the number of family members involved in the company has increased. As a successful business, the numbers speak for themselves. Today, LDC employs more than 18,000 people, works across 75 production sites in France, Spain and Poland, and, in 2015, had revenues of €3.5 billion.

LDC, which also comprises a large food convenience business, is behind well-known French poultry brands such as Loué, Le Gaulois and Maître Coq. With the acquisition of the MARIE company in 2009, LDC's convenience division is now one of the most recognizable brands in the fresh and frozen convenience range in France. LDC's Tradition d'Asie brand is also well established in the exotic speciality segment, and its Regalette brand is known for crêpe and ice cream products.

Chicken run

The story of LDC is one of hard work, innovation and cooperation between families to facilitate the success of the business. Denis's family, the Lamberts, are the biggest shareholders in the group, and their association with poultry goes back at least three generations. Denis's grandfather established a poultry slaughterhouse after World War II in the town of Sablé-sur-Sarthe in the Loire region of France. He went into business with his son Rémy Lambert. A few years later, Rémy decided to join forces with Gérard Chancereul, his main



Le Gaulois, one of LDC's major brands, was represented at the renowned Tour de France 2016.



LDC's brand Maître Coq was represented at the start of Vendée Globe in 2016, the famous sailing race around the world.

competitor in the region in which they were both based. They merged their companies and created LDC in 1968. LDC was thus established on the basis of a partnership between the Lambert and Dodard Chancereul families.

Rémy tragically died a few years after Denis joined the business in 1981. In the early 1980s, although successful, LDC had only one location and generated revenues of €70 million. Things were about to change under Denis's leadership. Gérard



Denis Lambert, as a child, stands with his father Rémy Lambert and his uncle Jean-Louis Lambert in 1965.

Chancereul became LDC's Chairman after Rémy's death, and he appointed Denis as Commercial Director. Denis soon proved his mettle and moved rapidly up the company's chain of command as the business grew through a series of his initiatives. He was appointed Head of Marketing in 1990 and, 12 years later, became CEO.

During this period, through mergers and acquisitions, two other families joined LDC. In 1989, the Guillet family reinforced LDC's activities by giving it access to complementary geographical areas in the Loire region. And, in 2001, the arrival of the Huttepain family enabled the LDC Group to acquire an upstream division and a presence in integrated poultry, animal feed and egg production. Today, the company's shareholding is split between the four families.

Satisfying all shareholders

The challenge of incorporating and satisfying all the shareholders has always been uppermost in the corporate and family governance structures at LDC, which have evolved with the successive integration of the four families. Today, these families have 48 descendants, of whom 8 work at the company. Each family has two representatives on the supervisory board, which is chaired by Gérard Chancereul.



Historic photograph of the market in Loué in 1960.

The supervisory board also has three outside members. Denis chairs the executive board, which is involved in the day-to-day running of the business.

Asked what it means to be a family business, Denis says the answer lies in satisfying all stakeholders. "First and foremost, it involves setting an example. Employees want to see family members involved. This reassures them and ultimately motivates them. All the shareholders are operational. As such, they have the same objectives as the employees. They are not disconnected from the company's day-to-day operations."



Grpe LDC's poultry division supports more than 1,400 farmers all around the country.



LDC's company headquarters is still in Sablé-sur-Sarthe.



Families and employees gathered to celebrate LDC's 40th anniversary.

“Growth without losing identity!” The company’s family character often comes to the fore when it comes to growing the business.”

Denis Lambert

That trust between the family shareholders and LDC’s employees lies behind the continuing success of the business. Denis’s own motto “Growth without losing identity!” helps to define the values of the company as it strives for growth. “The company’s family character often comes to the fore when it comes to growing the business,” says Denis. “LDC succeeds by developing its processes – it takes time to observe and learn from the existing processes to build something better.”

Denis encourages a very hands-on approach to managing the business, which helps to promote stakeholder value. He is known for his direct approach and accessibility to all employees; something he learned from his father, who was also known for his down-to-earth style of management. Despite the size of its workforce, says Denis, LDC is decentralized, with autonomous subsidiaries pursuing their own projects. “These projects are supported by a family member who facilitates their implementation,” says Denis. “This also enables the right decisions to be made quickly.”

In order to facilitate these practices, LDC has set up a management campus to train and support the company’s top 100 managers. The aim is to acquaint them with the company’s special features – such as its decentralized management practices and family business ethos – over a three-year period. A group comprising the top 20 managers has also been set up to raise succession issues and to reflect on the future organizational structure of the business.

Denis says innovation is in the company’s genes. As proof of this, around 30% of LDC’s turnover is generated by products that did not exist five years ago. LDC’s innovative efforts are helped by an R&D team of 100, which is backed by 1% of company revenues earmarked for these efforts every year.

When it comes to Denis’s successor, the four family shareholders will no doubt have much to ponder. Will one of Denis’s five children take over from him, or will a member of one of the other families take the top position? Indeed, maybe that position will be taken by a non-family member, given the

emphasis the business places on training non-family managers. Whatever the outcome, LDC’s values and culture will prevail for years to come – as enduring as any marathon.



Denis Lambert with his team.

Denis Lambert

Chairman and CEO

Company name: **LDC**

Generation: **Fourth**

Founded: **1970 in Sablé-sur-Sarthe, France**

Industry: **Poultry**

Employees (2016): **18,000**

Revenue (2015): **€3.5b**