

Lancaster Colony (LANC) EQ Update- 3/19 Qtr.

Current EQ Rating*	Previous EQ Rating
3+	3-

*For an explanation of the EQ Review Rating scale, please refer to the end of this report

We increase our earnings quality rating to a 3+ (Minor Concern) from a 3- (Minor Concern).

LANC missed earnings targets by 10 cps in the 3/19 quarter. Most of the shortfall seemed to be higher than anticipated costs related to recent acquisitions and the resumption of brand marketing investment in its New York Brand Bakery. Analysis of the likelihood of recent acquisitions living up to expectations is beyond this earnings quality review. From a purely accounting level standpoint, we actually saw some improvement in the quarter:

- Inventory days of sales were essentially flat with the year-ago quarter with the finished goods percentage also stabilizing. This reduces our mild level of concern with recent increases in inventory balances.
- The company expensed an \$88,000 increase in the value of contingent consideration related to acquisitions in the 3/19 quarter versus a \$525,000 increase in the year-ago quarter. Remember that this compares to a more than \$9 million *decrease* to the value of contingent consideration recorded in the 12/18 quarter. Given the timing of the write-down of the contingent consideration in the 12/18 quarter following by significantly higher costs related to acquisitions in the following quarter, we can't help but wonder if the two were somehow related. For now, it appears that the outlook for its acquired operations has stabilized.

Explanation of EQ Rating Scale

6- "Exceptionally Strong"	Indicates uncommonly conservative accounting policies to the point that revenue and earnings are essentially understated relative to the company's peers. Higher possibility of reporting positive earnings surprises
5- "Strong"	Indicates the company has no areas of concern with its reported results and we see very little risk of the company disappointing due to recent results being overstated from aggressive reporting in recent periods.
4- "Acceptable"	Indicates the company may have exhibited a minor "red flag", but the severity of the issue is not yet a concern. Minimal risk of an earnings disappointment resulting from previous earnings or cash flow overstatement
3- "Minor Concern"	Indicates the company has exhibited either a larger number of or more serious warning signs than companies receiving a 4. The likelihood of an immediate earnings or cash flow disappointment is not considered to be high, but the signs mentioned deserve a higher degree of attention in the future.
2- "Weak"	Indicates the company's recently reported results have benefitted materially from aggressive accounting. Follow up work should be performed to determine the nature and extent of the problem. There is a possibility that upcoming results could disappoint as the impact of unsustainable benefits disappears.
1- "Strong Concerns"	Indicates that the company's recent results are significantly overstated and that we view a disappointment in upcoming quarters is highly likely.

In addition to the numerical rating, the EQ Review Rating may also include either a minus or plus sign. A minus sign indicates that our analysis shows the overall earnings quality of the company has worsened since the last review and there is a possibility the numerical rating will fall should the problem continue into the next quarter. Likewise, a positive sign indicates that the overall earnings quality is improving, and the company may see an upgrade in its numerical rating should the trend continue.

Key Points to Understand About the EQ Score

The EQ Review Rating is much more than a blind, quantitative scoring method. While we utilize proprietary adjustments, ratios, and methods developed over decades of earnings quality analysis, the foundation of all of our analysis is reading recent SEC filings, press releases, conference call transcripts and in some cases, conversations with managements.

The EQ Review Rating is not comparable to a traditional buy/sell rating. The Rating is intended to specifically convey the extent to which reported earnings may be over/understated. Fundamental factors such as forecasts for future growth, increasing competition, and valuation are not reflected in the rating. Therefore, a high score does not in itself indicate a company is a buy but rather indicates that recent results are a good indication of the underlying earnings and cash generation capacity of the company. A low score (1-2) will likely result in us performing a more thorough review of fundamental factors to determine if the company warrants a full-blown sell recommendation.

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