

# Loma Negra First Quarter 2018 Earnings Call and Webcast May 9, 2018 at 10:00 AM Eastern

CORPORATE PARTICIPANTS

Gaston Pinnel – Investor Relations

Sergio Faifman – Chief Executive Officer & VP, Board of Directors

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#### About Loma Negra

Founded in 1926, Loma Negra is the leading cement company in Argentina, producing and distributing cement, masonry cement, aggregates, concrete and lime, products primarily used in private and public construction. Loma Negra is a vertically-integrated cement and concrete company, with nationwide operations, supported by vast limestone reserves, strategically located plants, top-of-mind brands and established distribution channels. The Company also owns a 51% equity stake in an integrated cement production plant in Paraguay, which is one of two leading cement producers in that country. Loma Negra is listed both on BYMA and on NYSE in the U.S., where it trades under the symbol "LOMA". One ADS represents five (5) common shares. For more information, visit www.lomanegra.com

### **Disclaimer**

This release contains forward-looking statements within the meaning of federal securities law that are subject to risks and uncertainties. These statements are only predictions based upon our current expectations and projections about possible or assumed future results of our business, financial condition, results of operations, liquidity, plans and objectives. In some cases, you can identify forward-looking statements by terminology such as "believe," "may," "estimate," "continue," "anticipate," "intend," "should," "plan," "expect." "predict." "potential." "seek." "forecast." or the negative of these terms or other similar expressions.

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The forward-looking statements are based on the information currently available to us. There are important factors that could cause our actual results, level of activity, performance or achievements to differ materially from the results, level of activity, performance or achievements expressed or implied by the forward-looking statements, including, among others things: changes in general economic, political, governmental and business conditions globally and in Argentina, changes in inflation rates, fluctuations in the exchange rate of the peso, the level of construction generally, changes in cement demand and prices, changes in raw material and energy prices, changes in business strategy and various other factors.

You should not rely upon forward-looking statements as predictions of future events. Although we believe in good faith that the expectations reflected in the forward-looking statements are reasonable, we cannot guarantee that future results, levels of activity, performance and events and circumstances reflected in the forward-looking statements will be achieved or will occur. Any or all of Loma Negra's forward-looking statements in this release may turn out to be wrong. You should consider these forward-looking statements in light of other factors discussed under the heading "Risk Factors" in the prospectus filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission on October 31, 2017 in connection with Loma Negra's initial public offering. Therefore, readers are cautioned not to place undue reliance on these forward-looking statements.

Except as required by law, we undertake no obligation to update publicly any forward-looking statements for any reason after the date of this release to conform these statements to actual results or to changes in our expectations.

#### **PRESENTATION**

### Operator

Good morning and welcome to the Loma Negra First Quarter 2018 Conference Call and Webcast. All participants will be in listen-only mode. Should you need assistance, please signal a conference specialist by pressing the star key followed by zero.

After today's presentation, there will be an opportunity to ask questions. To ask a question, you may press star, then one on your telephone keypad. To withdraw your question, please press star, then two. Please note that this event is being recorded.

I would now like to turn the conference over to Mr. Gaston Pinnel, IR manager. Please go ahead.

#### **Gastòn Pinnel**

Thank you. Good morning, everyone, and thank you for joining us today. Speaking during today's call will be Sergio Faifman, our CEO and Vice President of the Board of Directors; and Marcos Gradin, our CFO.

Both will be available for the Q&A session. Before we proceed, I would like to make the following Safe Harbor statements. Today's call will contain forward-looking statements and I refer you to the forward-looking statements section of our earnings release and recent filing with the SEC. We assume no obligation to update or revise any forward-looking statements to reflect new or changed events or circumstances.

Now, I would like to turn the call over to our CEO, Sergio Faifman.

### Sergio Faifman

Thank you, Gastòn. Hello everyone, and thank you for joining us today. It is a pleasure to welcome you to the Loma Negra's first quarter 2018 Earnings Conference Call. I will start with an overview of our performance during the quarter and market trends and then, Marcos will go over our financial results. After the results, we will open the floor for questions.

Starting with slide three, we are pleased with our results in the quarter. We executed well and delivered strong top- and bottom-line growth, market dynamics remained strong supporting healthy volume growth and a favorable pricing environment.

Against this backdrop, revenue in pesos were up almost 42% year over year, with adjusted EBITDA increasing 41%, and net majority income 49%.

When measured in US dollars, we also reported solid results, despite the 25% depreciation of the peso during the period.

Revenues were up 13%, adjusted EBITDA rose 12% and net majority income increased 18%. Furthermore, in the context, we are also able to increase margin of cement in Argentina by over 200 basis points, and we expect to achieve additional improvements throughout the year.

This performance was further supported by a healthy balance sheet, with net debt to last 12 months EBITDA for 0.53 times, providing flexibility to support our growth initiatives. To this

extent, we continue to make progress with the expansion of the L'Amalì plant, located in Buenos Aires, the region with the highest growth potential in the country.

This plant is anticipated to increase capacity by 40%, while driving additional profitability gains. During the quarter, we started civil works and ordered the main equipment. We remain on schedule to start production in 2020.

# Let me now go over the macro outlook and review of industry trends on slide four.

Economic activity in Argentina expanded at a solid pace last year and expectations are for GDP expanding around 2.5% this year. Private construction and public infrastructure works continued to drive cement and concrete demand in the first quarter of the year, supporting growth in construction.

Industry cement sales during the first quarter of the year remained at high levels similar to what we saw during the last months of 2017. And while year on year growth in March was impacted by strong comps last year, the industry posted consistent growth on a sequential basis. Actually, both the industry and Loma Negra achieved record sale volumes for a first quarter. While the bagged cement market presented a moderate increase, the market for bagged cement posted an outstanding performance in the quarter.

Demand was driven by the numerous public works projects throughout the country that began last year, which resulted in an industry growth of 23% for concrete volume when compared with the same quarter last year.

This robust sustained demand included an additional operational, logistical, and commercial effort that resulted in higher level of capacity utilization at both plant and transportation fleet.

Looking ahead, we continue to see the cement industry in Argentina growing at around 6% with current public works moving ahead, but growth reflecting more difficult comps.

Now, please turn to slide five for a review of our topline performance by segment. Supported by strong infrastructure growth and private construction, revenue from cement, masonry, and lime in Argentina were up 41% year-over-year.

Solid volume growth of 9.5% was further supported by higher year on year price, including increases during the quarter, reflecting our focus on growing the topline while preserving margins.

Our participation in the living infrastructure project in the city of Buenos Aires and Rosario, as well as in greater Buenos Aires allowed us to deliver robust growth in the concrete segment, with revenue almost doubling year on year, driven by strong volume growth and higher prices.

Cement revenue in Paraguay increased 23% from a year ago quarter, as price increased and the impact of the Guarani appreciation more than offset the 5% decline in volume in the quarter, compared with an 8% decline for the industry due to a slower start to the year.

We also benefited from a strong demand, aggregate volume increased 22.9% while revenues were up only 31.3%, giving a significantly higher share of FOB sales in this quarter.

The new crusher began operation in April, and is expected to allow us to double production capacity and aggregates once it's fully operational mid-year.

Finally, volume in our railroad cement declined 5%, mostly due to lower transport of volumes of third-party aggregates. Despite this, revenues were up 23% year-over-year, reflecting higher prices.

I will now hand off the call to Marcos Gradin, who will review our financial results and comment on our view for the remainder of the year. Afterward, we will open the call for questions. Please, Marcos, go ahead.

#### **Marcos Gradin**

Thank you, Sergio. Good day, everyone. Moving down to the P&L on slide six, consolidated gross profits increased 38% year on year during the quarter. Gross margin in our core business, the cement operation in Argentina, was up 221 basis points to 33%, benefiting from a healthy pricing environment and solid demand.

Consolidated gross margin, however, contracted 74 basis points to 28.7%. This was mainly due to the higher share of lower margin concrete revenues in Argentina following the strong growth achieved during the quarter. We also had lower fixed cost dilution in the railroad segment as a result of a drop of approximately 15% in transported volumes of third-party aggregates.

Keep in mind that over 80% of our cost structure in Ferrosur is fixed.

On the SG&A side, higher cost dilution and a reduction in effective sales tax rate rose a 118 basis point year-on0year reduction in consolidated SG&A as a percentage of revenue to 7.2%.

Turning to slide seven, robust revenue growth resulted in a 41% year on year increase in consolidated adjusted EBITDA, reaching nearly 1.2 billion pesos or US\$59 million. The margin remained strong at 25.7%. Importantly, we are seeing strong profitability in the cement segment in Argentina, supported by the good market dynamics we just discussed.

Adjusted EBITDA in this segment was up 52% year-on-year, while margins expanded in excess of 200 basis points. This improvement was offset by the vigorous development of the concrete segment, along with the lower profitability in the Railroad, and to a lesser extent, in the Aggregate segments.

Cement in Paraguay also contributed to this good performance with adjusted EBITDA up 23% and margins relatively flat at 43%.

Finally, it is important to emphasize the consolidated adjusted EBITDA increased 12% in US dollar terms, despite the sharp 26% depreciation of the Argentine peso.

Moving to the bottom line on slide eight, the net majority income for the quarter was up 49% year on year, exceeding revenue growth and reaching 526 million pesos. In US dollar terms, net majority income increased over 18% to \$37 million from \$23 million in the comparable quarter last year.

In addition to the good operational results, net income also benefited from the recent tax reform, which drove our effective tax rate down to 28% in the quarter from 32%.

During the quarter, we also reported a foreign-exchange loss of 109 million pesos as a result of a 7.3% peso depreciation compared to an FX gain of 87 million pesos a year ago from the 3% peso appreciation.

This effect was partially offset by an increase of over 100 million pesos in interest income due to higher cash balance.

Moving on to slide nine, we maintain a healthy balance sheet with a solid financial profile that provides us flexibility to pursue our growth plans. Our net debt to adjusted EBITDA ratio stood at 0.5 times at the close of the quarter compared to 0.3 times at year-end 2017.

Remember that the first half of the year is seasonally more intensive in terms of working capital needs, which results in lower capital generation. We invested almost \$40 million during this quarter. The majority of this was allocated to the expansion of our L'Amalì plant, mainly for the down payments for civil works and equipment.

Furthermore, and taking into consideration funding of the L'Amalì expansion project, at the recent AGM, our shareholders approved the full reinvestment of Loma Negra's 2017 earnings.

Turning now to slide 10, for the coming year, once again we are expecting healthy overall market growth. The pace, however, is not expected to be as strong as 2017, which had benefitted from pent-up demand. Argentina, our largest market, is expected to continue to benefit from infrastructure along with private construction.

We are encouraged by our position in the market and our ability to continue to have a leading role in the future growth opportunity. Our brand recognition and nationwide distribution provide a strong base to continue balancing growth and profitability.

We are pleased with the continued momentum in our business, while executing on our many priorities and simultaneously positioning the company for long-term growth. Capacity expansion at our L'Amalì plant is progressing as planned. When completed, we will have significant capacity to meet the expected demand.

Importantly, this new efficient facility will help drive improved profitability. In sum, we continue to make progress on our strategic initiatives. Our balance sheet and financial position are strong, which provides us a solid foundation to future growth.

This ends our prepared remarks. We are now ready to take questions. Operator, please open the call for questions.

### **QUESTION AND ANSWER**

#### Operator

Thank you. We will now conduct a question-and-answer session. If you would like to ask a question, please press star, then one on your telephone keypad. A confirmation tone will indicate that your line is in the question queue. You may press star, then two if you would like to remove your line.

For participants using speaker equipment, it may be necessary to pick up your handset prior to pressing the keys. Once again, star, one on your telephone keypad.

We also would like to ask that you please limit your questions to one question and one follow-up, please. If you have additional questions, you may re-queue for those questions, and they will be addressed.

Also, please note that Mr. Sergio Faifman will be responding in Spanish immediately following an English translation. Please hold momentarily while we assemble our roster.

And the first question comes from Daniel Sasson from Itau BBA. Please go ahead.

#### **Daniel Sasson**

Hi, good morning everyone. Thanks for taking my questions. My first question comes on the back of the recent depreciation on the currency in Argentina. I believe that considering that your cement prices in dollar terms have declined by at least 10% versus the average of the first quarter, how quick do you expect to increase prices in local currency to recover prices and profitability in dollar terms?

And still on that question, do you expect any impact on volumes coming from likely higher inflation on the back of this more depreciated currency, given the negative impact on the population's disposable income? That would be my first question. Thank you.

### Sergio Faifman

Good morning, Daniel and thank you for your questions. In terms of pricing, our pricing strategy was to increase our prices above the line of our cost increases. If we analyze depreciation of the Argentine peso at the end of December and then again at the end of April and May, if we analyze the current pricing structure, we can see that today the EBITDA is similar to our EBITDA in November, then our contribution in US dollars per ton is also similar to the figures of November, even following the price increases.

If we analyze the impact of inflation in the volume of sales, historically speaking, in Argentina, whenever there's inflation, people try to maintain their purchasing power by investing in durable assets, and that includes alteration in constructions and increases in construction.

If we analyze the first quarter, the volumes were very good and we saw growth. In April, we continue to see growth, and even with inflation our volume is still above our estimation. We're having volume growth of two digits compared to last year.

If we set aside the volatility that we have witnessed in the past two weeks, economists in general agree that there is going to be a GDP growth of around two or 2.5%, and the Cement Producers and Manufacturers Association, in line with that, also foresees growth of 6%.

### **Daniel Sasson**

Perfect. Thanks a lot for the answer, Sergio. My second question is related to how do you see the risk of the market becoming oversupplied by 2020 after all the investments in new capacity from you and from your competitors as well. How do you see that supply demand balance in 2020? Thank you.

# Sergio Faifman

First, we need to understand that the Argentine industry had a capacity deficiency, and last year, when the volumes of last year, we were running at full capacity.

The two main investment projects that we can see undergoing right now is the Cemento Avellaneda project in Cuyo [unintelligible], and our own project in the province of Buenos Aires, which are totally different markets or areas. The Holcim project, as far as we were informed, it hasn't started yet.

For 2020, we still have two years to go, and any volume increases will call for additional capacity. We also need to bear in mind that our L'Amalì project is not only about increasing capacity, but also we do think of our cost structure, and that includes both our fixed and our variable costs.

# Operator

And the next question comes from Nikolaj Lippmann from Morgan Stanley. Please go ahead.

## Nikolaj Lippmann

Hi, good morning and congrats on the numbers. Thanks for taking my question. My question is really on demand, if you could provide some color on where you're seeing it. What sectors of the economy--residential, infrastructure and so on. Where you're seeing the greatest impact on demand, and also perhaps I see the ready-mix business is doing very well, and one would think that that could be Buenos Aires.

Also, to what degree are you pushing the ready-mix business as a defensive measure in the light of potential imports and new capacity, you're trying to capture that channel. Those are my questions. Thank you very much.

## Sergio Faifman

Good morning, Nikolaj. Thanks for your questions. Well, if we analyze the market today, we can see strong sales in terms of bulk cement, and that goes mainly to infrastructure projects and major private works. And also, we have seen an increase against last year in the sales of bagged cement.

So if we analyze the current mix, we currently have 40% of bulk cement sales and 60% in bags. The bagged cement goes for work that has already started, and they have a schedule that they need to comply with, and they are quite tight on the deadlines.

In terms of our bulk sales, we have extended our capacity in some of our mobile plants that are dedicated to specific works that we have contracts for. And in those contracts, there are schedules that are set forth and they have to be complied with. Most of those works have a two-year term or a bit more than that.

If we analyze the growth of concrete, the two main areas for growth are Buenos Aires and Rosario. We are expecting sales for 1 million cubic meters of concrete in Buenos Aires and Rosario, which are our two core areas and the areas where we expect to be.

#### Nikolaj Lippmann

Thank you very much. If I could follow up with one additional question, please. Would you just provide quickly any sense of why the third-party railway business suffered a little bit this quarter and how we should think about that going forward? Thank you.

# Sergio Faifman

Well, the strong impact that we have seen in the railway operations is basically in third-party aggregate transportation, because it during January and February, these parties have been focused on repairs and maintenance to get prepared to a very busy year with high-capacity.

The railway business is a quite intensive business and 80% of our costs in the railway business our fixed costs, so a 16% decrease in the transportation of aggregates has had an impact in profitability during the first quarter.

However, we expect the numbers to continue as we had forecast for the rest of the year and we see this as a temporary issue that has only taken place during January and February.

# Nikolaj Lippmann

Thank you very much. Very clear, and congratulations on the good numbers.

### Operator

And the next question comes from Dan McGoey from Citigroup. Please go ahead.

# Dan McGoey

Good morning, gentlemen, thanks for taking my question. Sergio, you mentioned that EBITDA per ton in dollars presently, I guess you meant maybe at the end of first quarter, if you could confirm that, right now is roughly in line with where it was in November before the currency depreciations. I'm wondering if you can also mentioned where we are in a dollar pricing relative to November.

And also, I'm curious as to how quickly you've been able to adjust pricing. If you can let us know how many separate price increases we've seen thus far this year and with what frequency you've been adjusting price. Thanks.

#### Sergio Faifman

Good morning, Dan, thank you for your question. Actually, we do not have a pricing policy in relation to frequency of price increases. That depends greatly on inflation, inflation level and the depreciation in Argentina, the Argentine currency. Sometimes we have increases every three months, but we also may have price increases every 30 days, depending on the scenario.

If we analyze what happened between November and today, there were many price increases, but on average if we compare these two to the last two of last year, the price is a little bit lower--around 1% or 2%. However, the EBITDA is the same and US dollars per ton and the EBITDA margin is higher.

### Operator

And the next question comes up from Eduardo Altanirano from HSBC. Please go ahead.

#### **Eduardo Altamirano**

Hi, gentlemen. Thank you for taking my question. Just to get an understanding in terms of what you're seeing with regards to sort of infrastructure and order backlog, what the breakdown is as well between government and also private spending on this matter.

#### **Marcos Gradin**

Eduardo, thank you for your question. This is Marcos. I will say it's not very easy to see how much is coming from public and how much is coming from private in infrastructure projects.

You have to measure that in terms of bulk. And in bulk, what we are selling, when you try to get the numbers, thinking about the backlog and the recent announcement of the national government, we believe that the projects where we are participating are on schedule, are at good speed.

And the reductions announced by the national government are for new infrastructure, and we don't know yet which kind of infrastructure, and we don't believe that is this 16% reduction should affect cement consumption or demand this year.

Once we have more information about what sort of infrastructure is delayed, we could have some more information about what they're planning.

On the other side, what we're seeing is that PPP, the projects are advancing quite well, and they should impact by the end of the year in the cement consumption.

#### **Eduardo Altamirano**

Excellent, Marcos, thank you. And if I could also ask a follow-up, and I guess this is to Dan's question, where I understand that you're targeting, let's say, some sort of an EBITDA per ton ratio going forward rather than a pricing policy going forward. Just to understand the way you're looking at your business and to understand, because of the volatility inherently, right now in the market in terms of with the FX. Should we kind of ignore the top line and just kind of target more of the profitability ratios? That's what I'd like to know. Thank you.

### **Marcos Gradin**

Before L'Amalì, it's ended, what you're going to see on our numbers and what we're trying to do is increase profitability, increase EBITDA per ton. There's limited room to do that. Yes, we are working at full capacity, but you should expect, still, an expansion of margins in the cement business in Argentina.

On a consolidated way, expansion is a little bit more limited. This quarter, we have expanded 200 basis points, and we were focusing on trying to expand our main business the way we are doing.

#### Operator

And the next question comes from Dan Daltman from Bradesco. Please go ahead.

#### Dan Daltman

Thanks, and congrats on the great results. So two questions. One, in the face of this uncertainty that we're seeing currently in Argentina, have you seen any of your customers cancel orders? Has there been any impact to your order book thus far? That's question number one. And then question number two, in terms of the financing of the L'Amalì expansion, can you just remind us how much of it is coming from Sinoma itself? Thanks.

### Sergio Faifman

Good morning, Dan. Thank you for the questions. Well, we haven't had any cancellations. We haven't seen that happen, but from the end of April and the beginning of May, we have seen an impact from weather conditions. We've had a lot of rain in this time.

It's not common for us to see two sunny days in a row right now, but whenever we do get two sunny days in a row, we get the levels that we had before, the sales levels that we had before April.

Now, of the L'Amalì project, the total Sinoma part of the project is 70%, but we are not getting financing from them.

#### Dan Daltman

Okay. If I could just follow up, and thanks for the answer, what is the source of financing for the project in addition to internal cash flows?

#### **Marcos Gradin**

This is Marcos. I would say that the first, it's coming from the capital injections we made to the company, the \$110 million. Second, we have retained earnings and we are not paying dividends this year, so we are relying this year on our own cash flow generation to fund what we have ahead for L'Amalì.

We don't foresee to raise debt this year, so we will fund the expansion with our own cash flow generation.

### Operator

And the next question comes from Mauricio Serna from UBS. Please go ahead.

#### Mauricio Serna

Hi, good morning. Thanks for taking my questions and congratulations on the results. First, I would like to ask about the residential sector, particularly what you continue to see on a sequential basis, stronger mortgages growth. But still, you know, you still talk about the volumes being more driven by the public sector. So what are you seeing there, especially given the recent hikes of interest rates? Do you expect actually more of a deceleration or downturn of this particular sector going forward?

Also, if you could share with us regarding your volumes in Argentina, maybe break it down on how the Portland cement behaved, just to see how that compares versus the industry growth. And finally, just to verify, as you are in the process of expanding the L'Amalì plant, when would we be likely seeing clinker imports to support the demand in the high seasons of the year? Thank you very much.

### Sergio Faifman

Good morning, Mauricio. Let me start answering your questions. Okay, going to the residential sector, with the increase in mortgage loans, it has not had an impact yet in our sales, because the first mortgages or mortgage loans that were granted were used to purchase existing buildings or real estate.

Well, the interest rate increase, I would analyze it in a two-fold way. First, of course there's going to be an impact, with the increase of interest rates on the mortgage loan industry. At the same time, the interest rate increase will have an impact in reducing the cost of construction in US dollars. That will allow people to save by building. That would reduce the cost of construction in dollar terms.

Okay, in our forecast, we've always been quite--taken public works and residential works in the same kind of projections, right? So we believe there's going to be bulk sales at around 40% or 42%, and in terms of the residential segment, we see that it's going to increase. We will see an increase there because of the mortgage loan increases, or because of the

depreciation and inflation in the scenario that would lead people to try to hedge by investing in real estate.

In terms of imports of clinker and cement, if we continue having volumes like the last year volumes, plus 5% or 10%, we can still supply internally those volumes. If the sales volumes increase more than 5% or 10%, we will have to start importing more clinker, and then the cement imports will come after that. But we will have to see how sales evolve in the two years from now until the time when we believe the L'Amalì plant will be completed.

### Mauricio Serna

Okay, got it. You didn't mention anything about the Portland cement trends in the first quarter for you guys?

# Sergio Faifman

Our growth was up 10%, and the industry growth was 13%.

#### Mauricio Serna

Got it. Thank you, and congratulations on those results.

### Operator

And this concludes our question-and-answer session. I would like to turn the conference back to Gastòn Pinnel for closing remarks.

#### CONCLUSION

#### **Gastòn Pinnel**

Thank you for joining us today. We appreciate your interest in our company and we look forward to meeting more of you over the coming months and providing financial and business updates next quarter. In the interim, the team remains available to answer any questions you may have. Thank you and enjoy the rest of your day.

#### Operator

The conference has now concluded. Thank you for attending today's presentation, you may now disconnect.