

STAND UP AND DELIVER

Ontario produce processor uses flexible stand-up pouching technology to achieve eye-catching shelf-presence for its innovative value-added products

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In the produce industry, creating something innovative is no longer the domain of the farmers growing the vegetables and fruits, as it exclusively once was long ago.

For one Ontario-based company, it prefers to invent its own innovation processes, with new flavors and products and even through technology.

Located in Mississauga, Ont., **Freshline Foods** offers a compelling case in point. First opening its doors in 1997, the fast-growing company is considered to be one of Canada's premier processors of fresh cut value-added fruits and vegetables.

A key member of a larger family of companies that provide fresh produce solutions from field to fork, Freshline with its 200 employees and 55,000-square-foot facility focus on the processing and packaging of fruits and vegetables.

"It all began with Bamford Produce, a fourth generation food service distribution company that was established in 1881," Freshline vice-president Noel Brigido told *Canadian Packaging* during a recent visit to the facility.

Along with **Bamford Produce** and Freshline, other companies in the group are: **Fresh Advancements**, an importer and wholesaler of fresh produce; **Bamford Family Farms** who provide local growing of many varieties of apples; **Bay Growers** who offer up-to-date apple growing, storage and packing facilities; and **F.A. International Inc.**, a global commercial transportation company specializing in logistics and supply chain management.

"Local initiatives are extremely important to Bamford," notes Brigido, "which is why we at Freshline purchase Ontario produce whenever



Freshline Foods vice-president Noel Brigido shows off some of the company's fresh-cut produce in eye-catching, high-quality stand-up pouch packs provided by Tempo Plastics, and filled via its high-tech WeighPack Systems Swifty Bagger 3600 filling-bagging machine at the processor's 55,000-square-foot facility in Mississauga, Ont.

possible.”

Obviously not all produce is available year-round in Ontario, but Freshline - while offering local, organic, specialty and value-added pre-cut produce - says it will always source the freshest available products daily from both local and from major growing regions all over the planet.

Through its 900-plus SKUs (stock-keeping units), Freshline offers up everything from sliced watermelon, tubs of portioned fruits, vegetable trays and fruit trays with dipping sauce all for the food service, industrial and retail market segments.

It all sounds like standard fare, but as Brigido says: “Freshline likes to find fresh ways to package things to create new opportunities for itself, our customers and for the consumer.”

In November of 2014, Freshline debuted its plan to expand its fresh cut apple product offerings when it launched its new **Flavoured Apple Slices**, a new tasty product it has targeted towards children and adults alike.

“We have two flavors - Niagara peach-flavored apples, and Concorde grape-flavored apples,” says Brigido adding that Freshline is working on additional tastes. “But when you bite into an apple splice, it tastes like a peach or it tastes like a grape. Customers have found the taste sensation to be exquisite.”

He adds: “Working alongside Food Freshly North America, Bamford Family Foods and Bay Growers, we have developed a new process of flavoring apple slices that maintains the apple’s texture and visual appeal while utilizing all natural flavorings.

“The flavoring also allows us to extend the shelf-like of the product.”

For Freshline, the result is an apple infused with natural flavors of peach and grapes that are crispy and crunchy that maintain its natural feel without any sugary or sticky coatings.



The innovative Freshline Foods Juice Kit packed with pre-washed, and pre-cut fresh veggies and fruits provides a healthy and convenient meal solution

The flavored slices are packed in a user-friendly 400g pack, and a snack-size 55g pouch, achieving North American distribution in January of this year.

For all of its sliced apple products, Freshline cores the apples, and then slices them into eighth - skin intact, before bathing it in ascorbate to prevent discoloration, followed by - if necessary - another bath in a secret flavorful concoction to create the *Flavored Apple Slices* products, before heading off to various production lines for packaging.

Along with ready-to-eat sliced apples in clam-shell packs, Freshline also packs the product in stand-up pouches, designed, and manufactured for them by **Tempo Plastics Limited** of Innisfil, who also provide the packaging for another innovative product. Debuting in June 2015, Freshline calls its new **Juice Kit** a convenient way to add more nutrient-rich fruits and vegetables into a convenient meal plan.

“More and more, everyone has a busy lifestyle, but are still keen on following a healthy diet,” mentions Brigido. “Juicing has grown over the years to where it has become a mainstream meal replacement for many customers.

“So we’ve created a meal solution that is both healthy and convenient.”

The first entry into the *Juice Kit* portfolio is a Kale Boost kit that includes: fresh-cut kale, carrot, apples, celery, beets and ginger packed within a 340g (12oz) pre-printed clear stand-up pouch.

“Our Juice Kits are packed with healthy, fresh, pre-cut and pre-washed produce in an ingredient combination that will provide the customer with a satisfying experience,” relates Brigido. “With the Juice Kit, whether busy and on-the-go, or simply looking for an easy meal solution, consumers can easily create their own nutritional juices or smoothies in moments.

Brigido is extremely high on the high-quality stand-up pouches created by Tempo Plastics.

The partnership between the two businesses began in March of 2011 when Freshline began using Tempo Plastic’s **TimeFresh** technology for both roll-stock VFFS (vertical form-fill-seal) bags and pre-formed pouches for produce packaging for both institutional and retail service markets.

According to Tempo Plastics senior technical advisor Michael Taylor, the relationship has constantly involved new packaging technology on behalf of Freshline, with various packaging options rising to the forefront.

“We began to supply our TimeFresh stand-up pouches to Freshline in the autumn of 2011, eventually supplying both it and a standard flexible pack option to them,” relates Taylor.

Tempo Plastics has been a leading practitioner in the Canadian market for MAP (Modified Atmosphere Packaging) and, according to Taylor, with the introduction of **TimeFresh**, a fresh range of pouches, bags and



The robust 14-head PrimoCombi weigher from WeighPack Systems accurately portions apple slices by weight into buckets to distribute into a Swifty Bagger 3600 (below).

film with custom-tailored permeability rates has taken pouch technology to the next level.

“Our TimeFresh packaging is actually designed for the fresh-cut and whole food markets because it maximizes freshness and extends product life,” explains Taylor, describing how near-invisible laser - cut perforations help maintain and protect the pack’s integrity and limit contamination risk - a win-win for the consumer, and customer.

As an option, Taylor says the *TimeFresh* products are available with an ethylene gas absorption and anti-fog properties.

“Basically”, sums up Taylor, “the TimeFresh packaging allows products to be kept natural without preservatives increasing distribution chains through its ability to extend product shelf life, and improving retailer profits with decreased product shrinkage and spoilage.”

On the mechanical side, Freshline has made some astute purchases, including an inclined infeed conveyor, a **Bingo Bagger**, a **V-15** single lane net-filling machine, a **VerTek 750** vertical form-fill-seal machine, a **Swifty Bagger 3600**, and a **PrimoCombi** 14-head multi-head weigher - all from the Montreal-headquartered **WeighPack Systems** with the first purchase occurring in 2003 and continuing to this day.

Established in 1991, WeighPack Systems is a Montreal-based manufacturer with a recently opened Mississauga System Center for sales and service, and operations in Las Vegas and Miami delivering quality-built packaging systems globally.

“While it’s true that we have been partners with WeighPack for a lot of years and still utilize machines purchased over 10 years ago, the point is they are robust and continue to work very well for us,” explains Bigido.

Constructed from stainless steel and standard food-grade components for all contact parts, the **Bingo Bagger** remains unique in the marketplace, according to WeighPack, as one of the few solutions that can

automatically vacuum or gas flush at the sealing station with human labor.

Using pre-made wicketed bags, the **Bingo Bagger** automatically opens, fills and seals the pouches with horizontal seal jaws, rather than a traditional rotary heat sealer thereby reducing the length of the machine and its cost.

Purchased new, Brigido says an 11-year-old **VerTek 750** bagger has been an easy to set-up, operate and maintain machine that has easily provided an ROI (return on investment) for Freshline.

Designed for a low-cost of maintenance using off-the-shelf parts, the **VerTek 750** easily interfaces with auxiliary equipment on the production line.

“Freshline Foods has put their trust in WeighPack Systems for over 12 years. I very much value their commitment to us and ensure that their every need is addressed promptly as if their business was our own. I have a lot of respect for Noel and will never let him down,” relates WeighPack vice-president of sales Nicholas Taraborelli, adding that the great working relationship between the two companies has helped each other grow over the years.

In March of 2014, Freshline made a pair of major capital investments, purchasing a **PrimoCombi** combination scale and a **Swifty 3600** bagger for pre-made pouches.

The **PrimoCombi** is the first open-frame combination scale with an electronic control panel that can be conveniently located anywhere. Its robust design eliminates the risk of water penetration within the controls of the scale by separating the electronics, as opposed to the more traditional location of placing it in the base of the scale where, for proper sanitation to be performed all side panels would have to be first removed.

The **PrimoCombi** uses a **Windows**-based **360** operating system, and possesses a 15-inch color HMI (human-machine interface), a robust stainless steel enclosed PC panel and, for harsh environments, is also available with IP-67 visage.



The WeighPack Systems Swifty Bagger 3600 provide fast and efficient packing of product in high-quality TimeFresh stand-up pouches manufactured by Tempo Plastics.

Adds Taraborelli, "Our Primo 360 software operates on a Windows platform includes Crystal Reports, Skype, triggers and alerts, as well as automatic scheduling, and can be serviced remotely free of charge via LogMeIn from any of our global facilities."

After product is carefully measured and doled out by the *PrimoCombi* scale, the produce is released into the machinations of the *Swiftly Bagger*, a machine that Brigido provides high praise to for its ease-of-use, cleanability and robustness.

Taraborelli says the *Swiftly Bagger's* design allows operators to physically see the entire filling process from the front of the machine, noting how some competing rotary-type baggers possess blind spots making servicing a two-person process.

"For Freshline, keeping everything clean is very important, so having a machine like the *Swiftly Bagger* where we only have to open up the clear lexan doors at the front to access the 24-inch bag filling area - well, that's a one-man cleaning job that can be done in mere minutes," extols Brigido.

The *Swiftly Bagger* is designed for food safety, with all the cams set in the back of the machine, with the bag filling assembly conveniently located at the front.

"It's a nice design," Brigido notes.

"The product will never touch the mechanics of the machine."

As well, Taraborelli says the easy-to-adjust bag magazine ensures that pre-made bags will always enter the *Swiftly Bagger* perfectly square, providing a consistent pack with a perfect seal.

With regards to the WeighPack relationship with Freshline, Taraborelli says: "I enjoy working with a straight shooter like Noel, as his expectations are clear, which in turn has allow to be a successful part of their growth."



Freshline is certainly a successful company - thanks in part to its sister companies and innovative concepts for fruits and vegetables but also, as Brigido notes, because of the partnerships the company has fostered with its equipment suppliers, like Tempo Plastics and WeighPack Systems.

"Both have been instrumental in helping us provide nice clean packaging for our innovative products, as everything we sell at Freshline is visual," says Brigido.

"The clamshell packaging is clear, the tubs for our Snacker line of fresh veggies is clear, there's clear view space on the pouches holding our Juice Kits and sliced apple products, and we do that for a reason," sums up Brigido. "We have nothing to hide when it comes to the freshness and quality of our fruits and vegetables, and when the customer can see what they are purchasing, we're confident that Freshline will continue to make inroads in this very competitive market. •

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