

Weighing the pack



PrimoWeigher VerTek VFFS

WeighPack territory manager Thomas Davis and Vacaville Fruit Company president Nicole Nola-Ciarabellini share their views on fill and seal packaging machinery

US-based Vacaville Fruit Company was founded in 1960 as a commercial dry yard, drying various products such as California apricots, peaches, nectarines, plums, pears, prunes and tomatoes. The handpicked fruits would arrive to be hand cut or machine cut and mostly sun dried. However, the company now only does speciality dehydration of fruits and vegetables in a large indoor tray dehydrator and packs various dried fruit, nuts and confectionery.

Before investing in equipment from packaging machine supplier WeighPack, the company was hand packing. Now, it is using a 10 head PrimoCombi scale alongside the VerTek automatic bagger. The weighing technology and vertical form, fill and seal (VFFS) automation has allowed Vacaville to

grow its business and it is now offering customers smaller snack sizes.

Knowing the business would be able to create more products under its own label and private label in addition to being able to manufacture more efficiently and competitively, was key in Vacaville Fruit Company seeking out new VFFS machinery. According to president Nicole Nola-Ciarabellini, price, versatility in film sizes and speed were the most important factors in contributing to the VerTek purchase.

With automation becoming increasingly important in the fruit, snack food and confectionery industries, Nola-Ciarabellini predicts the company will incorporate additional lines of automation in the future. "With minimum wage in California continuing to increase over the next five years, we have to look for more ways to automate

the hand packaging process and cut costs," she explains.

WeighPack territory manager Thomas Davis highlights the case study:

What was Vacaville Fruit Company's main objective?

To weigh and dispense dried fruits, nuts and various candies.

What machinery did the company purchase?

PrimoCombi combination scale to weigh product and the VerTek VFFS machine.

How has the customer's packaging process changed as a result?

Prior to purchasing the WeighPack system, Vacaville Fruit was packaging by hand with several people on the

production line, which was both time consuming and labour intensive. After an in-depth analysis of costs, benefits and return on investment, Vacaville Fruit purchased the PrimoCombi scale and VerTek VFFS System. At this time, the company was running only one bag size, though its piece of VFFS machinery offered a wide range in terms of package size capabilities. Their VerTek could package bags from one to 5.5 inches wide and two to eight inches long at speeds of up to 50 per minute.

WeighPack also manufactures the VerTek 800, 1200, 1600 and 2400 models depending upon the speeds at which the customer needs to package in addition to the sizes of their bags. With the VerTek, bag changeover is simple with a removable bag forming tube and quick adjustable pull belts. Also, a pneumatic film roll shaft holds the film core concentric to the shaft to reduce vibration or wrinkling at top speeds.

What new opportunities did this create?

By purchasing the PrimoCombi combination scale and VerTek VFFS bagger together, Vacaville is now able to fulfill orders in a much faster fashion compared to its previous process of weighing and bagging by hand.

Now, WeighPack's step by step automation includes a combination scale to accurately weigh Vacaville's fruits, nuts and candy mixtures with sensitivity to one hundredth of a gram. After product is weighed and adequately proportioned, the VerTek is integrated to bag these snacks into retail ready pillow pouches. With its scale and VFFS system, Vacaville Fruit Company is capitalising on increased production speeds and front-line efficiency.



VerTek 800

Vacaville Fruit Company is capitalising on increased production speeds and front-line efficiency

What were the most important factors contributing to the purchase?

Vacaville repeatedly emphasised its need for a system that was fully functional, yet streamlined and compact. Similar to many customers in the industry, the company wanted to ensure that it was optimising its available factory space.

WeighPack's compact VerTek was a suitable solution as it offered versatility, flexibility and overall

simplicity for a company completely new to the complexities of automation.

For many packaging machinery customers, simplicity and ease of use rank very near or at the top of the list in determining which equipment to incorporate in their facility.

The VerTek VFFS packaging solutions offer features, including enhanced human machine interface (HMI), intuitive colour touch screen functionality and Omron PLC which make maintenance, operation, service and communication easier.

Aside from simplicity, customers place a high value on having flexibility in their packaging process. Understandably, people want to get the most out of their machinery.

One of WeighPack's central value propositions revolves around engineering solutions to accommodate future growth.

As Vacaville takes on new business and the confectionery industry evolves as a whole, we are positively challenged to stay ahead of the curve.

The planning process is already well underway for another bagger at the Vacaville facility as it seeks to incorporate additional lines of automation. ♦

