



# REFRESHINGLY SIMPLE

A new Reiser traywrapping system helps Quebec vegetable processor maintain product freshness right to the consumer's plate



Bercy Foods uses a Fabbri Model 55 Plus shrinkwrapping machine from Reiser Canada to apply a clear film cover over its tray-packed fresh fruit and vegetable products at its state-of-the-art production facility in north-end Montreal.

BY PIERRE DESCHAMPS  
PHOTOS BY PIERRE LONGTIN

Many a book has been written adequately noting and describing the health benefits of Mother Nature's fresh fruits and vegetables for the average human being, but for one Quebec company, keeping things fresh has provided a well-deserved financial benefit and respect within the Canadian produce industry.

First opening its doors in 2007, the Montreal-headquartered **Les Aliments Bercy (Bercy Foods)** is a successful family-owned processor and packer of fresh produce, as well as an importer and distributor of organic products.

Bercy Foods—run by founder and company president Michael Orsini—is a sister company of **Courchesne Larose Ltd.**, well-known and re-

spected as one of Canada's oldest and largest fruit and vegetable importers and distributors.

Before settling in at its current 40,000-square-foot state-of-the-art facility in Montreal's north-end back in 2009, the initial success of Bercy Foods caught the company off-guard, causing the upstart business to twice move into larger facilities over a three-year span.

Following the lead of its founder and company president Michael Orsini, Bercy Foods maintains a healthy fascination with the technical developments within the industry, always seeking to enhance its own production process.

By following the innovation trend, Bercy Foods quickly became a Canadian leader in its field, standing out with its multiple offerings within the fresh ready-to-eat segment of the fruits and vegetables industry.



Bercy Foods director of research and development Jinan Al-Douri with samples of fresh produce trays wrapped by Reiser's Fabbri Model 55 Plus shrinkwrapping equipment.

The term 'fresh' is easily glossed over by the consumer, who simply wants to eat a fresh product but cares little for how it arrives at the market in such pristine shape.

For Bercy Foods, however, ensuring that the customer and consumer get what they need is a key focus.

"At Bercy Foods, our mission has always been to ensure that sanitary conditions are met and maintained throughout the product's lifecycle to ensure that the retailer offers only the best to its customers," Bercy Foods director of research and development Jinan Al-Douri told *Canadian Packaging* during a recent interview.

When it comes to the sale of organic produce, ensuring the pesticide-free fruits and vegetables are safe for consumption is a full-time concern for Bercy Foods.

The produce processor maintains a cooperative relationship with its producers and distributors, and also lays out its own distribution channels allowing it to continually monitor and track the quality of its products from farm-to-fork.

As one of the leaders in the wholesale distribution of fresh organic products in eastern Canada, Bercy Foods ensures all of its organic products respect the regulations of **Ecocert Canada**, a certification body that assures organic consumers that they are getting a pure organic product, taking into consideration that all the farming, packing and storage standards are met.

Al-Douri says that Bercy Foods understands that with the company involved in the highly competitive fresh produce market, customer and consumer perception is everything and so the quality of its fruits and vegetables needs to be consistently of a



## PACKAGING FOR FRESHNESS

top quality.

While even the most cursory look by the consumer can help determine whether or not to purchase a particular fresh product, Bercy Foods is aware that things are quite different when it comes to ready-to-eat packaged foods.

Al-Douri says that Bercy Foods products are packed on site, with the packs and contents tested daily to better ensure a high level of food safety.

“Not only do we do our own tests on the spot, but we also mandate a third-party external laboratory in Montreal to do the same to ensure we only provide a safe and healthy product that meets and exceeds the highest industry standards,” she explains.

The recent creation of a ready-to-eat products division at Bercy Foods means there’s a need for processed food products and packaging.

For many companies involved in the ready-to-eat market segment, the whole or pre-cut veggie platter is a key product for all involved.

“These days, it seems that no one has enough time to prepare full meals at home,” notes Al-Douri. “When Bercy Foods decided to enter the ready-to-eat food segment, we knew from the get-go that any product we offered had to provide the consumer with time-saving benefits, while still maintaining the healthy aspects of the vegetables and ensuring it had an appropriate shelflife for the customer, too.”

Because Bercy Foods was able to attain and maintain those goals from the outset, “we have been able to grow our reputation in the market day-after-day, providing high-quality products that also maintain traceability and offering an exemplary level of safety,” notes Al-Douri.

On top of the ready-to-eat products found in major Quebec food chains, Bercy Foods specializes in a few distinctive niches.

According to Al-Douri, it sorts, washes and packs its cherry and grape tomatoes for customers under the *Delicioso* and *Quali-plus* labels, as well as under its own brand, *Verdania*, “all in a first-class hygienic environment.

“We spare no effort to ensure to ensure we produce products that maintain their high quality.

She continues: “In salads, sauce or in their pure unprocessed form, our tomatoes have an important nutritional value, and we know that it is important to the consumer.

“We also offer sweet peas and snow peas, two products that are so packed with vitamins and bursting with freshness that it’s like eating candy,” extols Al-Douri.

While the natural flavor of its fruits and vegetable is paramount—an excellent starting point is always required in the produce industry—Bercy Foods is quite aware that how the food is processed and how it is packed and packaged is of equal importance in maintaining its quality.

One of the newest pieces of equipment at Bercy Foods is a **Fabbri Model 55 Plus** shrinkfilm packaging machine supplied by **Reiser Canada** and installed in September of 2015.



The Fabbri Model 55 Plus shrinkwrapping machine from Reiser can overwrap up to 55 containers per minute.

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Fabbri is a market leader in the design and manufacture of automatic shrinkwrapping machines used in food processing facilities worldwide.

Quite expectably, before making any sort of capital investment, Al-Douri says the company did its due diligence to determine the best machine for its situation.

“Before opting for the Reiser Fabri 55 Plus, we did a lot of research,” notes Al-Douri. “We visited industrial fairs where we could see and compare what the market has to offer.

“At the end of the day we went with Reiser.”

According to Al-Douri, Bercy Foods has had good previous experiences with Fabbri equipment, but what really tipped the scales towards the Reiser machine was the *Model Plus 55*’s “efficiency, speed, flexibility for ease of maintenance and simplicity to afford proper daily cleaning.” For Al-Douri, the *Model 55 Plus* has worked like a charm performing as advertised since its installation.

“We chose this model because it can wrap between 35 to 55 containers a minute, which corresponds well with the speed of the rest of our production line,” relates Al-Douri, adding that along with possessing modern servo efficiency, other key factors in opting for the Fabbri *Model 55 Plus* are its ability to change a film roll quickly and, “the fact that to operate the machine we only require one operator.”

Able to handle a wide range of tray sizes, the Fabbri line of automatic shrinkfilm wrapping machines from Reiser produce a low-cost, highly-attractive package that maintains that just-packed fresh look on the retailer shelves.

Able to store up to 99 tray ‘recipes’, the easy-to-use operator-friendly controls utilize a full-size screen for easy manipulation that also provides self-diagnostic analysis.

Reiser’s Fabbri *Model 55 Plus* stretches plastic film to overwrap fresh food products in pre-formed trays with Al-Douri noting that Bercy Foods uses the *Model 55 Plus* to wrap its vegetables via two types of Styrofoam packaging—No. 2 and No. 42 trays.

For cartoning of the finished product, Bercy Foods uses an Eagle Packaging Machinery tray former supplied by WeighPack Systems. Installed in 2009, this VASSOYO AIR tray former uses a Nordson adhesive system to erect product-style trays with stacking ledges at

speeds up to 25 cycles per minute.

Although there are many reasons for the success of Bercy Foods in the highly competitive market segment of fresh fruits and vegetables, Al-Douri says it can be narrowed down to three key factors.

“First, we pack fresh fruits and vegetables, and have an automated system to apply a special identification label that indicates our fresh guarantee,” Al-Douri points out.

“As well, our dedicated staff is thoroughly trained to ensure our finished packaging consistently conforms to the needs of our customers which helps us maintain superb quality control,” he continues.

“Lastly, in order to preserve our guarantee of quality and freshness, Bercy Foods packs its products and delivers them fresh daily to our customers, so that the consumer can always be assured that they are purchasing a genuinely fresh product.”



An SEW-Eurodrive motor provides smooth power distribution to the Bercy plant’s weigh scales.

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