

PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

Innovation is All About Culture at Swiss Valley Farms

Ten years ago, Swiss Valley Farms teamed up with Delkor Systems of Minneapolis, Minn., to pioneer the first SPOT-PAK® packaging line in the United States. The success of that joint effort eventually changed the way cultured dairy products were packaged throughout North America. Today about 40 percent of all cottage cheese and sour cream produced in the United States and Canada is packaged in SPOT-PAK® packages.

With the expansion of Swiss Valley Farms' cultured production in 2001, it was also time to upgrade the Delkor SPOT-PAK® lines, and again Swiss Valley Farms and Delkor teamed up to provide significant innovation. In an effort to provide its customers with the maximum range of packaging alternatives, Swiss Valley Farms asked Delkor to develop a SPOT-PAK® machine that could package the full range of cultured products from 4-ounce yogurt cups through 5-pound tubs. In addition, Swiss Valley Farms wanted to use this same machine for packaging 4-, 6-, and 8-ounce yogurt in fiber trays or die-cut corrugated trays, with rapid change-over between cup sizes, pack patterns and tray styles.

"The machine which Swiss Valley Farms outlined represented a significant engineering challenge, but we also knew it represented the Holy Grail for a cultured products producer," says Dale Andersen, president of Delkor Systems. "The target was one machine, which could be



Delkor's new Servo Laner accommodates rapid changes for pack patterns and cup sizes.



The new SPOT-PAK® Robotic Palletizer is designed to handle the full range of SPOT-PAK® packages.



Cottage Cheese Products in SPOT-PAK® Packages with Top Pad. Delkor has received both U.S. and Canadian package patents for this innovation.

easily converted to run a wide variety of package styles and pack patterns for every container size. In addition, Swiss Valley Farms asked us to assist in finding a partner that could provide a robotic palletizer with the same degree of flexibility."

To allow the flexibility of the 5-pound tubs, a top pad was added to the SPOT-PAK® package. Delkor patented this variation of its SPOT-PAK® package a few years ago, and it greatly expanded the range of products that could be included in a SPOT-PAK® package. To accommodate the rapid changeover for cup sizes or pack patterns, Delkor developed a servo driven laner. This Servo Laner automatically adjusts for any cup size or pack pattern (4-, 6-, 8-, 12-, 16-, 24-, 32-ounce, as well as 3-, 4- or 5-pound tubs).

In addition to this flexibility of cup sizes, Delkor added both a fiber tray and open die-cut corrugated tray loading options to offer a range of shipper alternatives.

"We knew from our long relationship with Delkor that they were capable of delivering innovation, and our new combination SPOT-PAK® and tray loading equipment more than exceeds our expectations," says Mike Klein, plant manager of Swiss Valley Farms' Cedar Rapids, Iowa, facility. "The variety it offers our customer base is important, and the ease with which we can move from one cup size, or package style to another makes it economically viable."

With respect to the automatic palletizing, Delkor teamed up with Columbia Okura to design a unique robotic palletizer, which could handle the full range of SPOT-PAK® packages (with or without top pads) as well as fiber trays and die-cut trays. The SPOT-PAK® Palletizer is the first of its kind and required a significant engineering effort on the part of Columbia Okura. "We focused our efforts with Delkor on designing a palletizer that could meet the range of flexibility they were building into their new design, and our joint efforts proved to be very successful," notes by Dick Sampson, sales manager of Columbia Okura,

"Innovation always comes with a certain degree of increased risk, but the key is having the right team and the right culture," adds Klein. "This was an important project for Swiss Valley Farms, and both Delkor and Columbia Okura delivered on their promises." df

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