

AUTOMATED PACKAGING SYSTEM PROVIDES COST SAVINGS, INCREASES PRODUCTIVITY FOR CABOT CREAMERY AND FARMDALE CREAMERY

Technology & Tradition Deliver a Winning Wrap for Cheese Makers

Founded in 1919 in Cabot, Vt., Cabot Creamery Cooperative is an approximately \$200 million business that is nationally recognized as a maker of award-winning cheddar cheese. On the opposite side of the country in San Bernadino, Calif., family-owned Farmdale Creamery has grown into one of the country's leading specialty cheese makers.

Cabot operates as a commercial and consumer business, selling cheese and other products directly to customers and creamery visitors. The cooperative's realm of flavored cheddar ranges from horseradish and roasted garlic to smoked and sun-dried tomato basil. Farmdale Creamery primarily sells its products to cut and wrap operations that repackage the cheese under various brand names and private labels.

Located in rural Vermont, near the village from which it takes its name, Cabot often experienced difficulty finding qualified employees in the sparsely populated region. In addition, the time consuming and physically straining motion of muscling 40-pound blocks of cheddar into bags as they were formed resulted in more frequent absences, exacerbating an already tight labor situation.

"Cabot and Farmdale wanted an automated packaging solution that would help them best use employees and keep the production lines going. The Cryovac® CL20 is designed to enhance operational efficiency, and we knew the automated technology could help these companies achieve their goals," stated Charles Dunlap, marketing director, dairy packaging for Sealed Air's Cryovac Food Packaging division.

Before installing the automatic cheese loading systems, both companies relied on employees to perform the repetitive task of loading cheese into bags or pouches.

"The CL20 works amazingly well," stated Marcel Gravel, plant manager at Cabot Creamery, which has a relationship with Sealed Air Corporation that spans more than twenty years. "Since the installation, we have experienced consistent high-quality products, very minimal downtime and lowered labor costs. We also have fewer product returns because the CL20 pouches have far less wrinkles than the bags we used previously." Since installing the CL20, we have been able to save nearly \$63,000 in direct labor costs." Additional savings have been realized in terms of employee injury reduction and productivity improvements.



With a long-term relationship with Sealed Air Corporation, Norm Shotts, president of Farmdale Creamery, was the first in the United States to purchase the CL20. Norm reports that "Deciding to purchase this Cryovac® system is one of the easiest slam-dunk decisions I've ever made. The CL20 has worked extremely well, fit easily into our plant space and caused minimal disruption during the installation phase. Since we installed our systems two years ago, we have

been able to reduce the number of workers on line from three to one. Since 2000, we have saved an estimated \$180,000 in labor costs."

Redirecting Labor

At Cabot Creamery, two cheese towers continuously produce 40-pound blocks of cheddar. Cabot required an employee to manually load the blocks into bags as they exited the tower. Employees tasked with packaging cheese had to be present and alert whenever a block emerged from the towers – approximately every 30 seconds. With millions of pounds of cheese produced each year, Cabot places significant value on ensuring that its operations run smoothly, and that the company's famous cheddar cheese is packaged in the most efficient manner possible.

With three towers forming 40-pound blocks of cheese, Farmdale also had to dedicate employees to the task of manually loading the blocks as they came from the towers. Like Cabot, Farmdale had a need for these workers in other more critical areas of its operation. In addition, manual loading often resulted in packages that had an inconsistent appearance and were more prone to wrinkles.

The two creameries realized that in order to reduce manual labor requirements so they could redirect staff to other tasks, they needed an automated solution.

The Cryovac® CL20 automated packaging system offered the ideal solution for Cabot and Farmdale. It enabled both companies to achieve and maintain production goals, significantly reduce labor dedicated to the cheese towers and direct the newly available labor to other areas of the operations. The job of loading 40-pound cheese blocks into bags suddenly became much easier and virtually injury free.

With the assistance of Cryovac® technical support, Cabot Creamery installed two CL20s and Farmdale installed three. In each case, in less than two days' time, the automated loading systems were incorporated into the companies' operations.

"The installation process was virtually seamless," said Shotts. "Cryovac had the system up and running quickly and smoothly, with minimal disruption to our operations."

Simplifying Packaging

Created with two goals in mind – simplicity and modularity – the 'ground-breaking' Cryovac® CL20 in-line system fully automates a heretofore monotonous and strenuous job by ejecting the blocks of cheese directly into gusseted pouches, then prepares them for sealing and vacuumizing. Designed with plug-in modules for quick servicing and product changeovers – it stores more than 300 pouches in a removable cassette - the CL20 is equipped with a pick-and-place module, bag-opening module, gripper system, an alignment chute and pouch spreader plates. Although the system is fully automated, it can be converted immediately to manual operation in the event of a malfunction so that no production time is lost.



The Cryovac® CL20 works in tandem with the Cryovac® RG20, a re-gusset machine that automatically folds and prepares pouches for vacuumizing. With the CL20 and RG20 working together, cheese blocks move from the tower to the end of the packaging line without human intervention. A red light on the top of the machine flashes to let workers know when the system is low on pouches

"Sealing" Relationships

"Since installing the CL20, we have realized a significant reduction in labor costs and work-related back injuries. We have seen many benefits from these operational improvements and enhanced efficiencies. Our customers like the uniform packaging, and our employees are extremely pleased with the new system, which is easy to operate and troubleshoot," said Gravel.

At Farmdale Creamery, management and employees are equally pleased. For Farmdale, which was previously using shrink bags to package cheese blocks, the pouches in the CL20 have proven both cost-efficient and neat in appearance, giving products a wrinkle-free and uniform look.

When asked what he would tell other companies considering the purchase of a Cryovac® CL20, Shotts jokingly responded that he would like to keep the benefits to himself to keep competitors at bay.