

Expanding Production With Form, Fill, And Seal



The use of fresh cut vegetables for foodservice has seen significant growth in the past few years, driven by hygiene regulations, customer preference for fresher meals, and convenience factors, such as quicker cooking times and reduced prep time.

However, innovative new packaging and processing developments are essential to the industry's further growth. To take advantage of this opportunity, food manufacturers are turning to a new array of technologies.

Keystone Potato Products LLC exemplifies this trend. The company wanted to expand its capacity and produce shelf stable refrigerated fresh cut potatoes in four formats (French fry cut, dice, slice, and quarter potato wedges) and two package sizes (five and ten pound bags).

In specifying the processing line components, a key requirement was a packaging solution that could handle a wide range of product formats and package sizes. Keystone turned to Bosch Packaging Technology for a packaging solution: the SVE 3800 AB vertical form-fill-and-seal machine.

The SVE is well-suited to many of Keystone's needs. Specifically, the flexibility of the machine is crucial for a number of reasons. Keystone's goal was to process and package French fry cuts, dices, slices, and quarter potato wedges. Within each one of these formats, there is a diversity of sizes. For example, dices come in sizes from 3/8 square to 1-1/2 inches square.

The SVE is specifically designed to package free flowing, loose products and can

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handle a wide variety of product sizes and formats. Incoming product flow is continuous and enters the machine from the top, fed by a weigher that is integrated into the SVE's control system. Simple adjustments to the weigher allow for a quick changeover between product formats and sizes, dependent on the target weight for the bag.

Keystone is using the SVE for two bag sizes: five and ten pounds. A key consideration that led to the company's decision to select the SVE was the ease of changeover between bag sizes. The SVE uses one forming tube to create both bags, so it is only a matter of changing the bag length and adjusting the fill weight, an almost immediate operation.

The machine currently runs 30 bags per minute for the five pound bags, but is capable of up to 120 packages per minute, depending on upstream product flow and bag size. If necessary, the SVE can package bag widths ranging from two inches to 15 inches and lengths of three inches to 24 inches.

Flexibility Key to Growth

With the line up and running since August 2008, Keystone is currently producing packaged fresh cut potatoes for the food service market and is soon to break into the consumer space. As growth continues, the company is expanding its work force and capacity to accommodate more volume.

The SVE is well-equipped to handle the increased volume with its high-speed capacity. However, perhaps more importantly, the flexibility of the machine — a variety of bag sizes, sealing configurations, and packaging films — will enable Keystone to adapt to the notoriously fickle demands of the restaurant and retail consumer markets.

For more information, please visit www.boschpackaging.com [1].

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