

## Quality On The Rise

*This article first appeared in IMPO's [September 2012 \[1\]](#) issue.*

Founded in 1886 by an Italian immigrant, Gonnella Baking Company can trace its roots back to a humble beginning on DeKoven Street in what is now Chicago's famed Loop neighborhood.

Still family-owned, Gonnella Baking Company now employs the family's fourth generation. The company provides all major Chicago grocery chains with daily fresh bread deliveries, but the company's real bread and butter is its contract baking business.

After purchasing a frozen pizza facility from H. J. Heinz Company in 1983, Gonnella expanded its product line beyond baked bread. Now, processing frozen product takes up a full 70 percent of Gonnella's business.

### **A Bun In The Oven**

Gonnella's baking process in its Aurora facility is similar for all its baked products.

The process begins in the scaling area, where dry ingredients — including flour and minor ingredients — are measured according to client-set recipe specifications before being blown through a dry hopper.

The dry ingredients are then added to a mixer along with the recipe's wet ingredients. Refrigerated jackets help to maintain dough temperature as dough is pumped onto a belt and conveyed to a dough rounder, which portions the dough into the appropriate size for the process application underway.

An intermediate proofing step allows the dough to relax before it is sent to the molder, which shapes the dough before baking.

The molded pieces of dough are put on pans, which are allowed to accumulate before being sent into a tray proofer for about an hour. The proofer has 120 shelves and provides a warm, moist environment in which the dough can rise.

After completing a proofing cycle, the pans of risen dough are sent to a water cutter, which makes rapid, precise cuts and is used to cut slices into buns or patterns into bread.

Pans are again accumulated and conveyed into a tunnel oven, which holds approximately 1,200 trays of buns at a time.

After completing the baking process, the trays are conveyed to a depanner, which uses suction to lift the bread from the pans. After the pans and bread are

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Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

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separated, the pans are “blown out” — a process used to remove any bread remnants from the pans — and sent to be cleaned and sanitized.

The newly freed bread is conveyed to a spiral chiller, which lowers the temperature of the product and stops the internal baking process. Gonnella’s Quality Assurance team checks the sizes of all finished rolls to ensure that any misshapen product is discarded. Data from this step allows the Gonnella team to determine whether tweaks to the recipe or process may be necessary.

After cooling, the products are conveyed through a metal detector in order to ensure product safety and are conveyed to three packing lines. Buns are sliced if client specifications call for it, and they are then sent to be wrapped. Gonnella recently added an individual bun wrapper, which allows the company to meet customer demands for single serving packages.

## Food Safety For The Future

As Gonnella Baking Company continues to grow, the company distinguishes itself through its sustained commitment to food safety and security.

In addition to industry-standard HACCP planning and company-wide food safety protocols, Gonnella undergoes audits by the National Sanitation Foundation and the American Institute of Baking. In 2008, the company was first certified as a BRC-compliant facility.

With every new certification, “we’re able to say to new customers, ‘look we have this too,’” says Daniel Herzog, the company’s Vice President of Corporate Compliance and Food Safety. The company is hoping, in this regard, that the quality of their product speaks for itself.

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