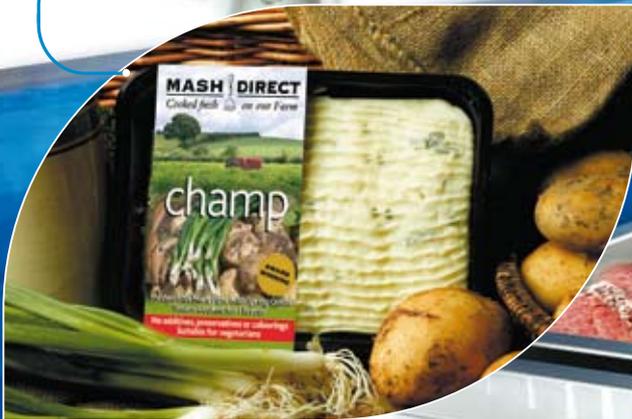


Tight Pack Control at Mash Direct



Wash N'Go

C&D Foods Reduces Clean
Time and Labour Costs

Conveyor Systems

Maintaining Low Cost of Ownership





WORD FROM THE TOP

In this issue of In Sync we visit Mash Direct, a leading Irish fresh produce manufacturer, which has revolutionized their packing process. We also see how pet food producer C&D Foods has reduced clean time and labour costs with an automatic multi-head hopper washer. We take a look at cost of conveyor ownership in an article that could help you reduce your long term costs. Finally, economist Mike Smyth ponders the economic trends faced by manufacturers in 2010.

The year 2009 was a difficult one for all. The economic downturn affected food and drink manufacturers as well as their suppliers. Increased price pressure, slower consumer spending and currency issues affected a market environment that was already facing challenges from the global economic downturn. However, according to a recent Board Bia press release, the outlook for Ireland's food sector is improving as export growth is set to resume in 2010.

We asked Mr. Michael Smyth, economist and the Head of School of Economics at the University of Ulster to take a look at the current economic trends and the outlook for 2010. In his column, Smyth points out that any economic recovery will be export-led as opposed to consumer-led. According to Smyth "exports instead of domestic consumption will do a lot to rebalance the economy."

SF Engineering is keenly aware of the fact that the main challenge will be to improve competitiveness while focusing on export growth. In 2009 the company sought strategic alliances, strengthened its operation in the UK and increased its R&D operation. This has made SF Engineering even better equipped to assist its customers in meeting their challenges in the coming year.

Seamus Farrell
Managing Director



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In this issue we have some exciting news to tell you about the business, our people, our products and our customers....

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Operations Manager Earns MBA

New Products Added To SF Portfolio

SF Opal has entered into an agreement with fish manufacturing equipment producer Valka involving the representation of the company's Rapid range of equipment in Ireland and the UK. The collaboration strengthens SF's product portfolio for the fish processing industry, enabling the company to offer a new innovative range of infeed, weighing and sorting solutions for whitefish and salmon.

Valka's product range compliments SF's current selection of equipment perfectly. The Rapid range includes the RapidAligner, a unique product in the market with its gentle product handling and advanced new grading methods, the RapidFeed for product infeed control and the multi-head RapidWeigher, which handles almost any type of fresh fish.

Visit www.valka.is for a detailed overview of the Rapid Product Range.



You tell us...

Let us know what are we doing well, where can we improve, what we can add to our product portfolio or the type of challenges you face in the production environment.

info@sfengineering.co.uk

SPOTLIGHT

Tight Pack Control at Mash Direct

Efficient Ishida traysealers and accurate and reliable checkweighers & metal detectors deliver the right packing quality for expanding chilled fresh vegetable producer.



Neil Houghton, General Manager of Mash Direct.

Mash Direct, manufacturer of Ireland's leading quick-serve mashed potato, vegetable and cabbage products, has installed several cost and time saving packing solutions from SF Engineering. Available in most major supermarkets, Mash Direct vegetables are grown, steam cooked and packaged on the farm and distributed throughout Ireland and the UK as well as being exported to Scandinavia and Europe.

Packing Quality & Consistency

This innovative food company has grown from five to fifty employees in only six years, earning multiple awards along the way. "The business has grown 35-40% a year and we've got two production lines. We've built a lot of our own equipment in order to get the right consistency for the mash but we needed



outside suppliers to provide equipment for the packing end of the operation," says Neil Houghton, General Manager of Mash Direct. "That's where we've been in

contact with SF Engineering who have supplied us with one of the best tray sealers we've seen and a very accurate and efficient set of combination metal detectors and checkweighers."

Close Seal Control & Higher Line Speed

Product innovation has driven the automation of the Mash Direct facility as fresh products with no artificial additives, preservatives or colourings need fast and efficient processing. "From chilling, the trays go to an Ishida 775 sealer which has worked really well for us," says Houghton. "The sealer has given us more consistent seals than before. It has also increased our line speed allowing us to reduce our working time."

The Ishida's QX-775 tray sealer suited Mash Direct's needs perfectly with the good speed and inside cut profiles it provides. "We like the close control it keeps of the seals," says Houghton. "We get very good peelable seals with the Ishida sealer due to good temperature control and consistent seal force, on other equipment we tend to find the seal control is more difficult."

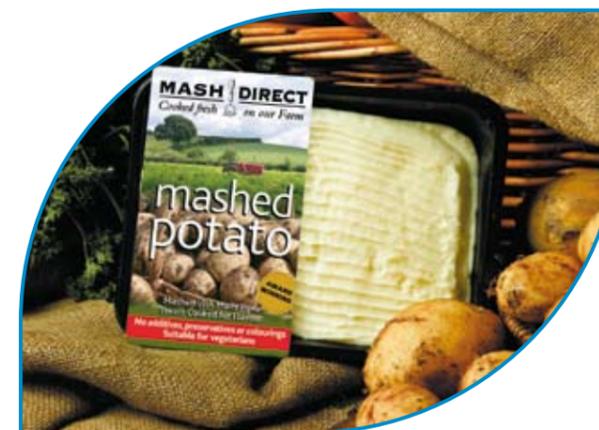
Small Footprint of Checkweigher & Metal Detector

Ishida's DACS checkweighers with a Ceia metal detector have proven to be fast, accurate and cost-effective. It was important for Mash Direct to maintain both their pack weight accuracy and high QC standards while also reducing giveaway.

"We find the combined checkweigher and metal detectors to be very good; one, because they've got a small footprint and we haven't got a very big factory and two, they tend to be very reliable. They give us good information about the weight and any metal contamination that might occur," says Houghton. "The machines provide us with excellent weight information and a final check for metal inclusions. We've seen them do very well over the last two years."

Good After Sales Service & Support

"SF's after sales service is good, which is very important to us as we have very few engineering resources," explains Houghton. "You find out the real calibre of a supplier when things get tough, SF have worked with us well through some difficult situations and we respect them for that."



Wash N'Go

Prominent Pet Food Producer C&D Foods Reduces Clean Time and Labour Costs with the Jeros Automatic Multi-head Hopper Washer

C&D Foods, one of the most successful manufacturers of top quality pet food products in the UK and Ireland has installed the new Jeros ACE High Speed Washer with great results. With multiple pet food filling lines that produce single serve pouches, the company needed an automated washing process for its large number of multi-head hoppers.

The new Jeros ACE High Speed Washer significantly reduces cleaning time and labour costs, while also providing a thorough cleaning solution at temperatures of 85 C°. It takes only 20 minutes to complete the full loading and washing cycle on this labour saving machine with lower water consumption than traditional power washing.

"We've significantly reduced our clean time and labour in the washing process while securing the best hygiene possible for our multi-head weighers," says Noel Brady, C&D Production Director.



The Jeros ACE Multihead washer reduces change over time & cuts labour cost.

"The Jeros Washer reduces handling and has helped us minimize the risk of contamination after cleaning. We are very happy with the result the machine has given us."

C&D Foods produces pouches and alu tray products at its production facility in Co. Longford. The Jeros Hopper Washer was the right fit for their innovative, automated and highly efficient production lines.

"One of the advantages we like is that the washer reduces machine downtime," says Brady.

"This not only speeds up production output but also helps maintain our rigorous production schedule with less cost."



Eliminate Rogue Contaminants

Protect your brand with Ishida X-ray inspection machines that help prevent faulty product leaving your factory. Do what you can to prevent costly product recall by selecting the right fit X-ray inspection system.



Jim Bedford, Product Manager for Ishida Europe.

While few are particularly fond of the subject of rogue contaminants in food products, food safety is a primary concern for all food manufacturers. Demand for efficient, accurate x-ray systems is on the rise due to increased pressure from the retail industry. This has motivated manufacturers to seek increasingly intricate ways of securing the quality and safety of their product. While good metal detectors will fully suit many production lines, there are others that need more sophisticated

X-ray inspection to deliver the required product quality.

Detect Potential Contaminants at Very Low Levels

"Ishida has responded to this trend by developing IX-GA range of X-ray inspection equipment in a variety of categories to meet different requirements," explains Jim Bedford, Product Manager for Ishida Europe. "Ishida's X-ray systems detect potential contaminants at very low levels and identify a wide range of product defects while simultaneously providing a useful way of monitoring piece and product weight."

Prevent Product Recall

SF Engineering has a team of specialists who work closely with Ishida to select and install the right x-ray solution. SF offers the Ishida's IX-GA line that caters to the entire spectrum of manufacturing requirements. With any of the IX-GA models foreign bodies – including metal, bone, plastic, glass, stone and hard rubber – are easily detected and recorded in everything from small trays and bags to large crates and cartons.

Brand Protection

"X-ray is one of the most effective ways of protecting your brand name. Our customers have gained, kept or increased orders due to the fact that they have put an X-ray machine on line and can offer a higher quality of product to their customers," says Bedford.

"Ensuring product quality is vital in competitive markets, particularly given the penalties that can be imposed for product contamination, the costs involved in a product recall and the damage these can cause to the company's brand or product image. Ishida's X-ray systems provide a cost effective solution for brand protection."

Cutting Edge Technology

Quality inspection with metal detectors is sometimes difficult, as traditional metal detectors can often not distinguish between 'legitimate' metal, such as clips on the ends of sausages or aluminium tins, and rogue contaminants. The Ishida X-ray inspection systems can penetrate aluminium foil and metal cans to reveal foreign particles as small as 0.5mm in diameter. Of equal importance is the IX-GA system's capacity to detect product defects ranging from misshapen pieces to cracks, lumps or voids.

X-Ray Installation Experts

"We work very closely with SF Engineering on all matters, from training of service and sales engineers to specification of systems for customers," says Bedford. "SF has an extensive knowledge of the X-ray applications we have out in the field and full access to our software support as and when needed."



Ishida's IX-GA X-ray machines easily detect and record metal, bone, plastic, glass, stone and hard rubber.

Conveyor Systems

Maintaining Low Cost of Ownership

Conveyor systems are the circulatory systems of the production facility, ensuring the proper transport of necessary elements to their rightful destinations. As with biological circulatory systems any blockages, clots or constraints will have a serious impact on the larger system of production. Cheap, poorly maintained or old conveyor systems can be likened to faulty veins that can cause a haemorrhage of resources resulting in incredible costs, costs that can easily be prevented and minimized.

Low Operation Costs

No matter what industry, food manufacturers need constantly to find ways of keeping costs down. Some of the major challenges producers face are: high maintenance costs, high cleaning costs and unscheduled downtime from component failures during production. These are challenges that the experts at SF Engineering and SF Opal help solve on a daily basis.

The team of conveyor design and fabrication experts work out of state-of-the-art facilities using the latest mechanical design software. Decades of conveyor expertise guarantee the best fit conveyor system for any type of operation.

“When designing new systems SF emphasises quality, durability and low operation costs as well as securing maximum conveyor uptime and efficiency in product changeover,” says Paul McKeown, Sales Manager at SF Engineering. “Production capacity is not the only issue to consider when buying a new system. Reducing manual handling and increasing overall efficiency while minimizing downtime, maintenance and cleaning costs are equally important.”

Long Term Benefits

The goal is to always deliver solutions that take into account the long term benefits and costs of the new system, not just the initial cost. This will not only include production benefits such as capacity and unit costs, but also ownership costs such as maintenance, cleaning and sanitizing, running costs and availability of spare parts.

For many producers frustration and dissatisfaction with older systems are the main drive behind upgrades. Yet, in trying to keep costs down budget constraints often limit the features of a new system.



This can lead to a compromise on efficiency and performance which in turn can negatively affect the long term costs of ownership. This dilemma is familiar to food manufacturers and equipment suppliers alike.

Cost of Ownership

“We understand the challenges producers face when it comes to conveyors and conveyor systems. One of the major issues to look at is the cost of ownership, not just the initial purchasing price,” says Seamus Farrell, managing director of SF Engineering.

“By installing a low budget system, producers are in turn faced with higher costs in the long run. This can mean having to use additional manpower to solve conveying problems, having people in place just to keep the line running. This leads to increased running costs and lower efficiencies.”



To put it bluntly, cheaper conveyors might have a positive impact on the initial budget but the results are high maintenance budgets, increased downtime, high water usage and subsequent effluent costs and extra man hours on cleaning. An inefficient system can also impact on increased unit costs for the customers’ product, which may not compare well with other plants or competitors in their industry.

Lower Conveyor Costs

How can food manufacturers lower their conveyor costs? The simple answer is by ensuring that the system is designed with the goal of ‘low cost of ownership’ in mind.

SF custom designs a system to deliver not only the required throughput but also to minimize the cost of ownership,” explains McKeown. “Running costs such as power can also be reduced through the use of energy efficient motors. And of course our end product is robust and durable for today’s production environment.”

5 WAYS TO LOWER OWNERSHIP COSTS

1. Consider maintenance and running costs as well as initial costs
2. Chose robust systems that prevent bottlenecks and minimise downtime
3. Use high quality components to lower maintenance costs
4. Use easy to clean belts to lower water usage and man hours
5. Reduce power costs with energy efficient motors

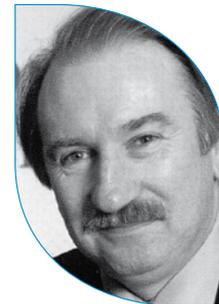
In the coming issues of InSync we will continue to cover this issue and take a closer look at downtime and maintenance, how to lower cleaning costs as well as how to keep energy and operational costs down. We will present interesting payback examples that will show how SF Engineering can lower the operational cost of conveyor ownership by 50%. Stay tuned.

2010 Economic Outlook

It is becoming clearer by the day that the UK economy started to grow again in 2009. The nature of the recovery in growth is interesting because it looks as if it has been mainly driven by a recovery in exports of goods and particularly financial services. This should not be a surprise because the pound sterling has fallen by 22% since its pre-crisis peak.

In the past sterling devaluations have helped to pave the way to recovery and to faster economic growth. Most recently after Black Wednesday in September 1992 sterling fell by 15%. Almost immediately the economy began to pick up and thus recovery lasted 15 years until the credit crunch came along. Why has the 22% fall in sterling over the past 18 months not produced a similar recovery? Because there has been a global downturn which has hit the economies of all our trading partners and world trade has been flat. Amid signs that France and Germany are picking up and the US economy is starting to grow again, the economics of China and India are pushing up world trade once more.

Mike Smyth is leading N-Ireland academic economist for over 32 years and a member of several strategy boards. He is a member of the CBI Economic Affairs Committee, the Economic Strategy Committee of the IOD, and the European Economic and Social Committee.



Mike Smyth - Head of School of Economics UU

This points towards an export-led recovery in the UK which will accelerate in 2010 H2. From an economist's perspective this is a 'proper' recovery and not a continuation of the debt-fuelled consumer boom that preceded and indeed precipitated the recession. Consumer-led growth is not even on the horizon. Irrespective of the outcome of the May General Election in the UK, expenditure will be curbed, taxes will creep up to help reduce the debt and interest rates will start to pick up later this year. All of these will hit household disposable income and consumer spending. The outlook for consumers is therefore very flat in 2010.

In the round however, a period of economic recovery, driven by exports instead of domestic consumption will do a lot to rebalance the economy. In the longer term this necessary rebalancing will enable living standards to grow once more.

Operations Manager Earns MBA



We proudly congratulate Michael Masterson, our Operations Manager, on his MBA degree. Masterson graduated with 2nd class Honors from IT Sligo after a two year part time program he undertook while also working full time. The MBA degree from IT Sligo is directed towards Senior Managers in the public or private sector. The objective of the course is to provide strategic leadership in an organisational setting.

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