

Saladworks

Marco's inspirational Trac-IT MES software suite and DataMaster stainless steel workstations are playing a pivotal role at Samworth Brothers' new Saladworks plant on the outskirts of Leicester.

Samworth Brothers is a privately owned family business and a leading UK player in the production of quality chilled, savoury and sweet food products. Completed in 2003 on a new green-field site, Saladworks is the latest development in the Group's impressive growth program and is designated facility for supplying fresh sandwiches, trayed snack salads and other high care, cold assembly products.



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Background



As with any manufacturing business traceability and control are key factors. On one hand, suppliers need to control costs, optimise productivity and minimise both wastage and giveaway. On the other hand, customers want to be sure they are receiving value for money and need to be confident that in the event of any problems that their suppliers can provide meaningful traceability data. Therefore, having the ability to control and track products throughout the process is invaluable to the Saladworks management team for meeting both current schedules and planning future requirements.

Paul Old, the Saladworks' project leader, is very upbeat about the Marco solution and points out: "We had been looking for some time for a suitable plant control system, which would integrate directly with our main AS400 computer system and provide us with suitable factory floor traceability. Unfortunately we found that traditional weighing companies did not have the necessary application expertise while designated software companies did not understand the practicalities of weighing in our environment. However we were determined to find the right integrated package and when we talked with Marco we realised that their system would provide exactly what we were looking for."

The Solution

The Trac-IT MES system is based around unique trace codes, which are assigned and affixed to products in the form of bar coded labels or tags. A specific code may refer to individual containers or bottles, trays of produce or individual items such as packages of meat. As soon as product arrives at goods-in, it is scanned. The initial checks ascertain that it has come from an approved supplier and the use-by date is then verified. The system advises where the product should be stored and where there is available storage space.

Every time the product moves to a different location, the label is read via a RF barcode reader and the database is updated. If the product changes through processes such as slicing, dicing, shredding or cooking, a new trace code is assigned to it, which also carries details of the original trace code. If more than one ingredient is mixed together, the resulting trace code for the mixture carries previous details of the trace code for all the ingredients.



By always knowing where a product is in the plant and its available shelf life, wastage is virtually eliminated. For example, as products such as lettuce pass from Low Risk preparation they are cleaned up and washed. The system can check the weight of the processed product in High Risk against that of the waste product being created in Low Risk. If products such as tins or wrapped meat have to be sanitised before being opened, the system keeps a check that this is being carried out and does not allow product to progress to the next stage without authorisation.

Trac-IT MES is automatically updated at each step and this ensures, for instance, that any potential problems with shelf life expiry are automatically flagged up. By the time product reaches the production line, even though it may have gone through a number of metamorphoses, a full trace history is instantly available.

The Marco system at Saladworks services two distinct functions. It provides overall traceability for all ingredients and also provides close control on the makeup of the finished products via the LineMaster workstations.

'Takeaway' weighing technology is well established in such manufacturing operations: rather than trying to achieve target weights by adding product to the tray placed on a scale, product is weighed out from larger containers and the loss in weight recorded. This gives a much faster process and provides greater control on the consistency and final weight. The supervisor can select the particular product to be produced via the 'Editor' PC, together with the correct tolerances applied to the works order codes, and then transmit these to the individual workstations. The LineMaster displays give the operators clear information relating to the particular run while high contrast, coloured, multi-section, bar graphs, changing from red through amber to a green acceptance zone, indicate whether the correct amount of product has been achieved.



The products can be made up with a mixture of weighed and counted produce components. The Marco system has a unique way of monitoring the overall pack weights and then automatically adjusting the target weights of the weighed produce within acceptable tolerances to maintain a consistent weight.

As Murray Hilborne, MD Marco, sums up: “Many companies glibly claim, often without substance, that their equipment or services ‘make a difference’. We know from our close association with the Saladworks’ managers and staff that Trac-IT MES really does make a difference for them. Their endorsements are unprompted - Trac-IT MES simply makes life easier for them and allows them to operate a successful and profitable organisation. And the improvement process is still ongoing.”

To learn more about Saladworks click here

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