Cost-effective Investment.

Pocino Foods Finds New IQF "Wave" Freezer from Messer Ends Flighted-freezer Headaches.

Now in its 80th year, Pocino Foods based in City of Industry, Calif., has produced premium quality deli meats and innovative meat products since 1933. Time-honored family recipes have been passed down through the generations, rich with ethnic heritage, which has established Pocino's products as high quality items.

Today this includes traditional Italian, Hispanic, Asian and uniquely American meat products – from individually quick frozen (IQF) items to deli meats and dry sausage – sold to retail and foodservice customers, and to further

processors and institutional markets for pizzas, frozen meals and other prepared foods. Close attention to freezing operations and plant hygiene help ensure quality.

As part of an $8M plant expansion last year, the company added an additional quality control lab, completely isolated raw and finished goods processing, and reviewed other areas for improvement. One of those was updating its IQF line for cooked sausage and meat crumble, meatballs, and sliced and diced beef products. "It was time to replace the flighted freezer. It didn't

have high enough capacity. CO_2 snow carryover was an issue, and we wanted a freezer that was easier to clean and more sanitary," said Jerry Pocino, Vice President and son of President Frank Pocino, whose father founded the company.

Out with the old
Messer North America evaluated the operation and installed the new Messer Wave Freezer in a transition last summer. The patented wave freezer is the first cryogenic tunnel freezer with rolling-wave action to keep IQF items separate as they

Pocino Foods quick freezes meatballs, pizza crumble and sliced and diced meat with the new Messer Wave Freezer from which features a patented rolling-wave action to keep products separate as they freeze.

freeze. The rolling-wave is fully adjustable and gently tumbles Pocino's cooked products as they are quick frozen to lock in moisture and ensure each piece is individually frozen. After quick-freezing, products are sent to a pack-off area for weighing and sealing into bags, ranging from 8 oz. to 10 lbs.

At Pocino, some meats are pre-cooked and diced before going through the Messer Wave Freezer. Others, like meat crumble, are extruded and continuous-cooked before spreading onto a conveyor on their way to the quick freezer. With the old flighted freezer, CO_2 snow carryover would require clean out several times a day, contributing to product losses and cutting into operational efficiencies. The hygieni-

cally designed wave freezer uses smooth internal surfaces to help eliminate areas that can trap food particles and help reduce the chance of contamination. The top of the IQF tunnel freezer raises vertically to provide complete access for cleaning, and internal areas are sloped to a center drain for easy washout.

Pocino Foods runs two 8-hour shifts, 5 days a week, and the IQF line produces different cooked products every day – meatballs, pizza crumble and sliced and diced meat. The Messer Food team provided training and worked with Pocino to program the new IQF freezer for each product using an easy-to-use touchpad. Pocino says the new wave freezer requires cleaning just once daily.

The Messer Wave Freezer can be equipped to use liquid nitrogen, but carbon dioxide (CO_2) was preferred in this case. The installation included ductwork for venting, and Messer's telemetry-based gas monitoring system. This system allows Pocino to monitor consumption of CO_2 per shift, per hour, or per pound of product through a customer portal.

"We were looking for a freezer that would increase throughput, efficiency of CO_2, be more sanitary, and easier to clean," Pocino says. "We chose Messer, because we felt it met all those needs, and it has."

Imprint

Printed from Meat & Poultry
January 2013

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3841_0120