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# Meat Business

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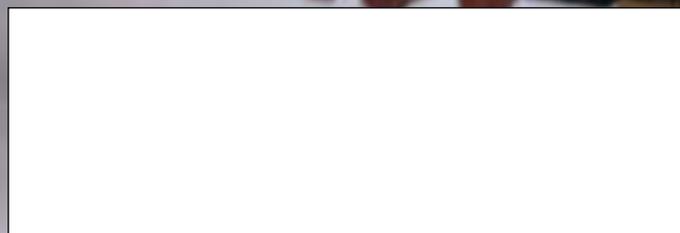
## Smoked Meat Memories

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# Automated Washing in the Food Processing Stream

Automated washing equipment ensures that meat processing containers are consistently cleaned and sanitized while improving throughput speed and reducing labour costs.

*By Ed Sullivan*

**HYGIENE MANDATES IN** food production and packaging facilities continue to be a critical focus of processors and regulators, yet some companies still cling to cumbersome and less-than-effective methods of washing and sanitizing containers used in the process stream.

Although existing regulations may not mandate a specific level or methodology of cleaning and sanitizing, there are hygiene and efficiency related reasons that food processors should pay more attention to this process.

In hand washing operations, including power spraying, there is much room for human error. Workers may not achieve the water temperature required to properly sanitize containers. Even after hand washing, food remnants and cleaning agent residue can remain in the seams and corners of containers put back into use.

By automating the washing process, however, food processors are assured a complete cleaning and sanitizing of containers every time.

There are also other benefits that add to the strong economic case for integrating automated washing systems. For example, saving on wasted labor and floor space and improving on production throughput are important incentives for many food processors.

“Washing systems are becoming an integral part of the food processing line,” says Mark Corser, president of Corona, California based CM Process Solutions, a nationwide supplier of stainless steel hygiene equipment, including commercial and industrial washing systems, for the food processing, pharmaceutical, and distribution industries.

“Instead of manually washing containers with a hose or pressure washer, which introduces risk into the process, more companies are installing systems that automatically meet its specific washing and sanitizing needs, and are also adding to their volume capacity as well,” Corser explains. “This approach ultimately impacts product quality.”



### No messin' with containers

Headquartered in Minong, Wis., Jack Link's Beef Jerky is the number one U.S. meat snack brand and fastest-growing meat snack manufacturer worldwide with products in over 40 countries. Beyond their premium meat snacks, Jack Link's is well known for its hilarious TV commercials, "Messin' With Sasquatch," in which jerky-loving, adventurous spirits play pranks on an unsuspecting Sasquatch.

Over the years, Jack Link's has expanded its operations and enhanced production facilities in order to meet growing consumer demand for their products. In late 2011, after 12 years of operation, plant management decided to upgrade a key internal production space in its New Glarus, Wisconsin facility. The formulation room, where beef sticks and sausages are ground and blended, was redesigned to maximize efficiencies and ensure that safety and quality standards are not only met, but exceeded.

A new, automated, washing system was installed to improve efficiency within the limited confines of the room. The main purpose of the new washing system was to improve turnaround of large, 1,200-pound stainless vats as well as 600-pound Vemag-type buggies that contain raw meat prior to processing.

"We purchased the washing equipment to streamline processes in our redesigned formulation room," explains Jeff Abrahamson, quality assurance manager. "It's important that our vats and buggies are cleaned and sanitized quickly and thoroughly. The vats are too big to be cleaned manually, so we needed a washing system that would clean and sanitize multiple vats and buggies automatically, within a limited space."

Abrahamson's team collaborated with CM Process Solutions to spec and design the washing system, the stainless steel vats, and also the racking system

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where meat is stored prior to processing.

“CM Process visited our facility to identify our needs and to present us with options and solutions,” explains Abrahamson. “I looked at a few different brands during our selection process, but their equipment seemed to be the most efficient when it came to the time to wash, to clean and to sanitize the vats – and it was the easiest to use. We were able to customize the machine to make it most efficient for our space, since we are space constrained in our facility.”

The new vat washer is an automatic system that contains a robotic arm to pick up the vat, invert it in the washer, clean the vat and then bring it out again. The washer can also be used on the smaller 600-lb. buggies that are still in use in some areas of the plant. In these situations, the buggies are wheeled to the washer and cleaned there.

The vats are used a half dozen at a time, twice an hour in the plant. They need to be cleaned after each batch because they oftentimes contain different species of meat.

“We’re automatically feeding the cleaning and sanitizing chemicals into the washer, so there’s very little hands-on work that has to be done. Once we have the cycles set we just push a button and let it go,” Abrahamson explained.

Abrahamson says the new system has allowed his operation to maximize throughput within the space, while saving on labor costs and ensuring proper food quality and safety standards are exceeded.

### Washing & sanitizing totes

DG Foods recently established a new poultry

processing facility in Bastrop, LA, to serve customers in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and others located west of its Hazlehurst, Mississippi headquarters plant.

The new operation, which processes thousands of pounds of chicken each day, required an automated washer that could clean and sanitize the totes and lids used to transfer chicken from the slaughtering facility to the new processing plant.

“We needed an automated washing system to recycle the totes as part of our continuous processing operation,” says Bill Bryant, general manager of the Bastrop plant. “Without it, we would be unable to efficiently clean and properly sanitize the totes and lids and couldn’t re-use them in the processing operation.”

After researching suppliers, Bryant’s team contacted CM Process Solutions to review the system requirements and specifications. “They did a very good job in recommending and configuring the system we eventually purchased,” says Bryant. “It was exactly what we needed at a competitive price.”



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– Mark Corser, CM Process Solutions

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In addition to system configuration, there are many other parameters that must be considered to provide the right washing system solution for a specific application. This includes water temperature, cleaning agents and water recovery systems, all of which can be vital to meeting both food safety and productivity goals.

For example, the choice of heating options – whether gas, steam coils, live steam injection or electric – could be vital to an application. The optimal washing system design also must take into consideration the quantity of items to be washed and the level of soiling, rinsing and drying requirements. Even speed of throughput should match the application, whether the requirement is a batch cleaning process with individual containers or a more advanced, continuous, multi-lane system. **M**

*Ed Sullivan is a Hermosa Beach, California-based writer. He has researched and written about high technologies, healthcare, finance and real estate for over 25 years.*