

Biscuits Leclerc enter US market with a complete production system from Spooner Vicars

When Canadian biscuit manufacturer, Biscuits Leclerc, made its recent foray into the US market, it called upon UK bakery equipment specialist Spooner Vicars to supply a complete production line at the newly-acquired plant in Montgomery, Pennsylvania.

For the 100-year-old family-owned company, this move into the US was a logical step in its development. With four factories in Canada, the Pennsylvania plant provided a perfect bridgehead for entering the US market.

The Montgomery factory originally produced pretzels in an overcrowded and fiercely competitive market. Spotting the wider manufacturing potential of the factory, the Leclerc family moved quickly and installed a new Stollich bar line in 2002 followed by the Spooner Vicars cracker and mini-sandwich biscuit line which was up and running in 2004.

Head of US operations, Dxxxx Lxxxxx, realised there was pent-up demand from private label and contract manufacturing customers such as Aldi and Wal Mart Canada. In typically bold Leclerc fashion, the company pushed ahead with the capital investment:

“This was completely new territory for us,” said Dxxxx, “but with the help of Spooner Vicars and the support of our customers, we could see great growth opportunities in the US as well as for exports back to Canada.”

The fully-automated Spooner Vicars system uses a 48-inch-wide line to produce bite-size sandwich crackers, although the system also has the capability to produce non-sandwich mini or larger-sized crackers.

For Biscuits Leclerc, cracker production was a totally new venture, as Denis Leclerc was quick to acknowledge:

“With completely different dough characteristics, we sought a system with a high degree of automation,” said Dxxxx. “The Spooner Vicars line is fully automated from mixing to cooling and requires only one person to watch the line.”

To make sure everything went smoothly from the outset, Leclerc sent its operations team to Spooner Vicars’ UK test centre in Manchester for pre-installation testing and to ‘tweak’ final formulations. In addition, four times per year, a Spooner Vicars technician is sent to Montgomery to provide further employee training and machine maintenance.

(sub-head)

The equipment in action

The Spooner Vicars mixer is a unique design that includes a static sprag, or spike, in the bowl that acts to reduce mixing times by up to 40 per cent. Incorporated into the spike is a temperature probe that allows the operator to monitor dough temperature in the centre of the mixing dough. This is a more accurate technique than many competitor probes which only measure temperatures at the edge of the mixing bowl.

The laminator has an extremely small footprint, using vertical space to incorporate three gauge rollers, two reduction rollers and the sheet-type lamination mechanism. The final gauge roller diameter is 16in. Position, speed, knife and all other settings are PLC-controlled. Process parameters for all formulas are pre-programmed into the control software and an operator simply presses one button to change all settings.

Laminated dough is reduced to the proper thickness and die-cut into any number of different shapes. Crackers are baked in Spooner Vicars’ 180-ft hybrid oven – two-thirds direct gas-fired and one third indirect-fired.

Impressed with the oven, Dxxxx Lxxxxx points to its flexibility and the control it gives over product baking parameters:

”Not only is it fully automated,” he says, “but a unique feature of the oven is the sensor that recognises large gaps between products caused by product changeover or mechanical downtime. The oven automatically reduces power to the burners and convection fans to maintain proper temperature and prevent flash burning once production resumes.”

NOTES FOR EDITORS

- Merseyside-based Spooner Vicars has designed, manufactured and supplied machinery and bakery products for over 150 years and is now a leading international name in high quality bakery equipment.
- Spooner Vicars can provide customers with a complete turnkey service from design to installation and commissioning.
- Spooner Vicars combines the latest technological advances and innovations to provide a full service from product development to equipment selection to after-sales service and maintenance.

Details of Spooner Vicars’ full range of equipment can be seen on the company’s web-site: www.xxxxx.com

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