

# Packing line solution for French Fries

BELGIAN-BASED POTATO processor Agristo NV has installed a customised packing line solution for frozen French Fries from Ishida Europe and its sole distributor in Belgium BRN, to deliver maximum production throughput and efficiencies as part of Agristo's new state of the art factory in Tilburg.

The Ishida/BRN solution handles the packing process from the outfeed of the freezing tunnel to the infeed of product to bagmakers. It incorporates six of Ishida's state of the art CCW-R series weighers, handling pack sizes from 450g to 2.5kg at speeds of up to 100 bags per minute for the 450g pack.

Agristo specialises in frozen and pre-fried French Fries, supplying the majority as own label in over 80 countries

worldwide. The company's longstanding relationship with BRN and Ishida made them the obvious choice to devise a suitable packing solution for the new factory.

From the freezing tunnel the French Fries progress onto an integrated weigh belt, which monitors line capacity. In order to regulate any fluctuations in the production and packing process and ensure a regular feed of product to the weighers, excess product is held in a special FIFO buffer to be fed back into the packing line at the appropriate time.

Product is also checked to remove any sub-standard items and then sorted into the correct ratio of short and long length fries.

The Ishida weighers are CCW-R-214W-S/50-WP models,



The Ishida CCW-R-214W-S/50-WP weighers feature a hygienic waterproof construction designed for frozen food applications

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A key challenge of the installation was to keep the upper and lower packing areas separate to enable easy hose

down cleaning of the weighers while preventing water ingress into the dry packing area below. In addition, the cross feeders feature a 0.5m<sup>3</sup> buffer capacity to regulate product flow to the weighers.

## Communication during change

In this second article **Gary Wyles** of Festo identifies the common communication pitfalls for communicating during an automation project

"CUSTOMERS EXPECT a quality product and this is why we're automating," says the managing director. What your employees actually hear is "You're not very good at your jobs so it's likely you'll lose your job".

There's nothing like poor communication to quickly jeopardise the success of a project. In our previous article we've looked at employee engagement. Communication forms a key part of engaging your people. If employees are engaged and involved in formulating the strategy, communication has already started. If not, don't leave it to the last minute.

Another pitfall is to confuse communication with information. Communication is tailored and specific to each audience and their specific and collective needs.

A useful way to categorise employees for a change project is as follows:

- Champion: how can I spread the word?
- Cooperator: it's inevitable
- Fence sitter: wait and see
- Cynic: another initiative
- Saboteur: not while I'm around

Another stumbling block to good communication is our own reticence. We are usually expert in creating logical reasons not to do something when actually we just don't want to do it. It might be because a leader thinks they've got better things to do and communicating is a waste of valuable time. There might be personal issues such as a fear of public speaking or many other reasons.

A common trap is that leaders aren't comfortable communicating

unless they have all the answers. To be honest though there are few organisations where a project of any size can be discussed without employees hearing about it. The grapevine is very effective and potentially extremely disruptive. It is far better to be able to say what you do know for certain and be crystal clear about what is not yet decided and when you will be able to let employees know.

For any project that is sensitive and can disrupt people, there is only one channel of communication that is of any real value. That is face to face. E-mails just don't cut it. Face to face it much more challenging logistically with shift work and a mix of employed and temporary staff but it is absolutely essential.

Leaders need to speak

personally, be open to questions, and have a timeline of when information will be available. Good communication is always a conversation, so have in place a system where feedback can be given confidentially or one to one with managers that is then passed onto the board.

If redundancies do need to be made, you will be judged as an employer by how well you treat those leaving the company. Do it well, as you'll retain key people. Do it badly and you will often end up losing the very people you wanted to keep.

Employees will always hear sensitive information through the filter of self-interest. So answer the 'what does it mean to me?' question and what and how you communicate will change significantly.

Chinese whispers demonstrates the importance of listening and clear communication.

■ **Gary Wyles** is MD of Festo Training & Consulting