



Recipe weighing and traceability system keep salads ‘crispy’

A comprehensive recipe weighing and traceability system installed by the Stevens Group is bringing important benefits to the Speciality salad section of Lincolnshire based Wingland Foods.

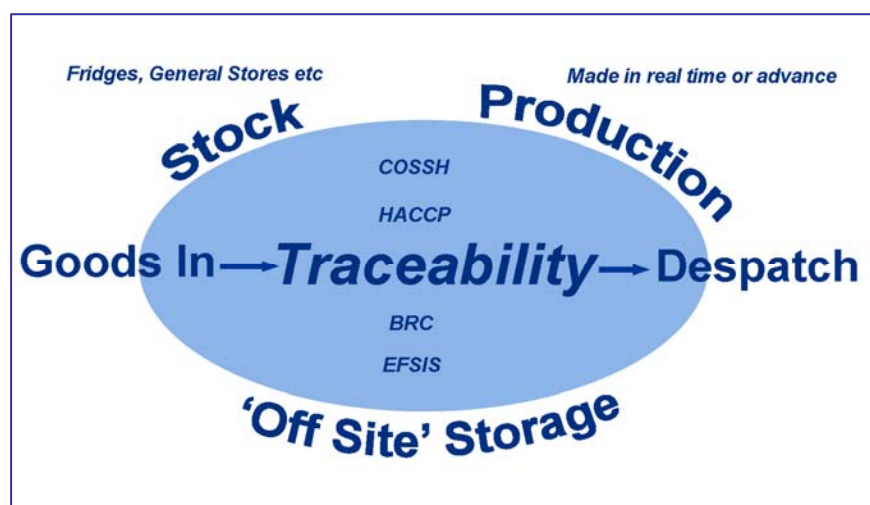
A comprehensive recipe weighing and traceability system installed by the Stevens Group is bringing important benefits to the Speciality salad section of Lincolnshire based Wingland Foods. The company is part of Geest Limited, the UK's leading producer of chilled foods, who offer over 4,500 products ranging from fresh pizzas, to leafy salads, lunchtime snacks, fresh soups, pasta and cheesecake desserts.



Our appetite and expectations for high quality 'convenience' salads have risen sharply over the past few years. There is now a tantalising array of freshly prepared specialist products to tempt our taste buds, including pasta, potato or rice based salads, and a wide variety of standard and exotic coleslaws. These may be served as accompaniment salads, snack salads or meals in their own right and this market covers individual pre-packed portions and self-service salad bars.

Ensuring consistent high quality for these hand-built products can be a challenging task, especially given the short lead times between order and despatch, together with increasing legislation in areas such as average weight and traceability. With a wide variety of orders arriving each day, and with an increasing number of products having to be processed, Wingland have recognised the importance of collecting and using dynamic factory floor data in conjunction with their own software system

Stevens UK Sales Manager Stuart Hunt is clear about how his company can help producers such as Wingland meet these demands and as he explains: *"We have extensive experience working with food producers and understand the daily challenges they face. Our weighing knowledge together with our ability to work with both in-house and third party software providers ensures that we provide a seamless link between the factory floor and management systems. This means that real-time data from the factory floor can be used to its full potential. Our systems provide full electronic traceability and*



remove the need for onerous paperwork systems with their associated problems."



The Stevens system is based around powerful operator terminals, working in conjunction with both stainless steel drive-through weighing platforms and minor ingredient scales. These are all networked back to a central PC running Stevens interface software specifically developed to work with Geest's own in house Recipe Generation Programme (RGP). Food grade thermal label printers provide flexible and reliable information at critical control points.

The traceability chain starts as fresh produce and other raw materials are booked into stores. Information relating to details on delivery vehicles, suppliers and use-by dates are checked against order requirements and logged into the system. At this point, the material is classed as raw stock and cannot be

released to production. As product moves through the process, the traceability continuum is maintained through the use of alphanumeric batch codes.

At the start of each day's production, the planning team enter the daily customer requirements into the system which converts them into optimum batch sizes. The recipe, BOM (bill of materials) and batch details are then downloaded via the Stevens RGP Interface Programme to the terminals on the factory floor so that the operatives can commence the recipe build. At the same time the system calls for the required ingredients, checking that sufficient in-date material is available. As product is released from stock to WIP, raw stock levels are automatically down-graded.

Ingredient addition is batch code driven and these are either entered manually or, where applicable, already downloaded into the system. The terminals provide clear screen prompts that guide the operator through the recipe formulation process and the clear coloured coded weight acceptance screens ensure rapid and accurate ingredient addition. These prompts may



also include information on how to add ingredients and also health and safety warnings which may dictate that the operator wear safety glasses or protective gloves for instance, thereby ensuring full compliance with COSHH legislation. Depending on the particular size of recipe batches these are either made up in 200 litre containers weighed on the drive-through scales or in smaller containers weighed using the minor ingredient scales.



As an extra check the system keeps track of all the ingredient usage by batch code. As product from a specific batch is used it automatically downgrades the released quantity. If an operator inadvertently tries to enter a batch code for product that has already been used up, the system flags up a warning. This is particularly useful for critical ingredients such as salt.

Wingland's Process Manager, Sam Hammad is positive about the improvements the system has brought to his production process and as he concludes: ***"We have relatively short term forward visibility and so need to be able to react rapidly to customer demands. These can be driven by a range of factors as diverse as public holidays, unseasonal weather patterns and even major sporting events. Stevens ability to understand our requirements and work with our in-house software team has ensured a very workable, yet comprehensive, system. We can readily access information on trends in yields, wastage and other key performance indicators. The system has removed a significant amount of production paperwork and now allows full paperless traceability to be generated automatically. If questions arise relating to any particular finished product or batch of ingredients, the system can rapidly identify, via electronic records, the what, where, when and who relating to the products involved. This engenders excellent customer confidence and brings the factory floor environment together with our management system."***

The logo for Vantage, featuring a stylized blue 'V' with a checkmark inside a square, followed by the word 'vantage' in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font.