

Gerawan Farming

Client Overview

Gerawan Farming is a grower, packer, and shipper of stone fruit including peaches, plums, and nectarines. The company's customers consist of high-end grocery store chains and large volume brokers. A large amount of Gerawan's product is shipped to the Northeastern United States and exported to Europe, Mexico, and Asia.

Gerawan offers a variety of packing sizes and styles to accommodate the diverse preferences of buyers within its industry. The company prides itself on producing a premium end product. Therefore, gentleness of handling is critical throughout harvesting, packaging, and shipping to optimize both the protection and presentation of the product.

The Challenge

Industry buyers requested that Gerawan package a "riper" product, therefore requiring even gentler handling methods. Demand from customers to provide an increasingly diverse offering of packaging styles was also rising. In addition, the company wanted to increase its packaging line efficiency to offset increasing labor costs and improve the current working condition for its packaging line employees.

Gerawan needed a design for a packed box conveyance system for a new packaging line that would handle the company's diverse mix of packaged product as gently and efficiently as possible. Gerawan asked Tompkins to design and integrate a line that was ergonomically superior to "standard" conveyor lines, with minimal noise levels and efficient workstations.

The Solution

First, Tompkins sent various sized boxes of fruit to the Tompkins Development Lab for simulation testing. Tompkins analyzed the conveyance of the boxes and the orientation of the product inside each box. Comparative decibel readings were also performed to determine which technology and equipment would create the most sound-friendly environment for Gerawan employees.

Tompkins determined that a conveyor system made of motorized drive roll (MDR) conveyor and MDR sorter provided the best protection for product boxes through no contact accumulation. Upon completion of the design, Tompkins' integration experts installed, tested, and provided startup support for the new solution.

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Using the Tompkins Control System (TCS), movement of product was controlled through lanes that are specially designed for each style of carton. The TCS provides a graphical display and operator interface for running and troubleshooting the conveyor system, as well as an interface to the supervisory control graphic that oversees the entire packaging line.

The Results

Tompkins' conveyor solution resulted in a flexible platform that meets constantly changing packaging styles and variable throughput requirements. The no contact accumulation feature of the MDR conveyor eliminates jostling of product and damage to containers due to excessive line pressure. Inherent control features of the MDR allow workstations to be fed and operated efficiently by employees without adding secondary systems and unnecessary cost and complexity. In addition, the conveyor noise throughout the system is undetectable above ambient noise from other portions of the line.

Since Tompkins implemented the new conveyor system, Gerawan has run the new line for double shifts throughout most of the growing season and is extremely pleased with the lines' functionality. "Tompkins Associates' ability to test equipment using the Lab is very impressive. They made design decisions based on decibel level and impact tests conducted in the Lab, while providing us with a quick, competitive proposal. Then Tompkins took the extra step—justifying recommendations and showing results of testing in a video presentation and through written documentation," said Dan Gerawan, President of Gerawan Farming.

Tompkins has provided a proposed layout for five new packaging lines that will potentially go into a new building in preparation for the upcoming packaging season.