

Safety first

Industry looks to packaging for added security

Irwindale, Calif.-based Ready Pac Foods Inc. has developed a custom Peel & ReSeal film for its lettuce clamshell containers.



Courtesy Ready Pac Foods Inc.

By Tom Burfield
ProduceOps Writer

The main focus of produce food safety programs so far has been on growing and processing operations. But lately, the emphasis seems to be spreading to the packaging side.

Packers, shippers and retailers have been evaluating every aspect of the packaging process, from the bins in the field to the machines in the packinghouse to the consumer packs themselves.

Packaged produce already is common in Europe, said Dan Vache, vice president, supply chain management for the United Fresh Produce Association, and for several reasons.

Containers are easier to merchandise than bulk product, they can help prevent food waste by improving a product's shelf life, and then there's the food safety angle.

Locks, films and tapes can help prevent product from being deliberately tampered with or inadvertently contaminated through handling by employees or shoppers in the produce department.

"You don't know where their hands have been," Vache said.

A consumer pack actually does more than

just prevent handling at store level, said Bob Whitaker, chief science and technology officer for the Produce Marketing Association,

It becomes "a vehicle for traceability," he said.

Traceback codes from programs like the Produce Traceability Initiative or even a shipper's own bar code are easier to apply when using a container, he said.

"It's harder to put a sticker on an individual piece of fruit or a vegetable."

Denham Plastics

Several companies have unveiled packaging-related products that can enhance the safety of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Denham Plastics LLC, Salinas, Calif., for example, makes harvesting containers with food safety in mind, said owner Mike Hutchings.

The company issues letters of guarantee that its containers "meet (Food and Drug Administration) standards for color and materials for direct food contact," Hutchings said.

They are free of BPA — or bisphenol — a chemical that has been used to make certain

plastics and resins and has sparked some health concerns.

For an additional charge, the firm offers containers with metal-detectable additives infused into the plastic that make it possible for metal detectors to detect pieces of plastic that might break off from the container and mix in with food products.

The containers can be used several hundred times before they are recycled into new plastic containers, Hutchings said.

The company recently opened a new division with a high-tech washing system that will enhance the washing process, he said.

Bosch Packaging

Bosch Packaging Technology Inc., New Richmond, Wis., introduced the SVC 4020, the first machine in its new hygienic and flexible vertical packaging machine platform last year, said Paul Garms, product and marketing manager. The machine is perfect for fresh or frozen food that's packaged in pillow bags, he

said. Other machines in the platform should be available for other pack styles.

The major advance in the machine is the hygienic design and ability to offer multiple hygiene levels — from a wipe-down machine to a full-wash down version, he said.

"Some of the more stringent hygiene levels are demanded by produce manufacturers," he said.

The machines pack commodities like sliced apples, salad mixes, baby carrots and frozen potato products.

The vertical form-fill seal machine takes flat roll stock film and forms the bag around the product, he said.

"As the product drops into the bag, it's creating end seals on the top and bottom and a fitted seal that runs along the back of the bag," Garms said.

The company has machines that accommodate reseal features, like zipper-lock reseals as well as tape and labels that can be used to reseal the bag.

The hygienic design enables packers to clean the machines so they don't harbor any bacteria that can get into food product, Garms said.

The company also offers horizontal-flow wrappers for multi-packs of products like bell peppers, spring onions and carrots.

Ready Pac

Irwindale, Calif.-based Ready Pac Foods Inc. has developed a custom Peel & ReSeal film for its lettuce clamshell containers, said Tristan Simpson, vice president,

corporate communications. The Clear Lam lidding film system replaces preformed rigid lids and uses less material than its predecessor and enhances sustainability, functionality and product quality, she said.

The printable Peel and ReSeal

film eliminates preformed rigid lids and PVC shrink bands. The filled lettuce trays are produced in Ready Pac's facilities, and the film is hermetically sealed, which allows for the use of modified atmosphere and helps extend shelf life, she said.

The system includes tamper-evident stickers and easy-open and re-sealable lidding. The film was an award finalist for Best New Packaging at United Fresh 2013.

Sabert Corp.

In the fall of 2010, Sabert Corp., Sayreville, N.J., introduced a tamper-resistant packaging option called SureStrip, designed to improve packaging food safety and security in an elegant-looking package, said Alexis Dykstra, product manager. This summer, the company plans to unveil an expanded line of containers that use the now-patented technology.

The security seal is built into each leak-resistant, pop-tight lid and eliminates the need for sealing equipment, shrink bands and heat tunnels and reduces energy use and labor costs, she said.

It originally was added to Sabert's line of nine Bowls2 (square bowls) ranging from 8 ounces to 64 ounces in black or clear.

The containers feature a perforated band that wraps around the outside edge of the lid. When the tab is pulled, it breaks, providing tamper evidence, she said.

"When you pull the band off, it doesn't leave a sharp edge anywhere," she added.

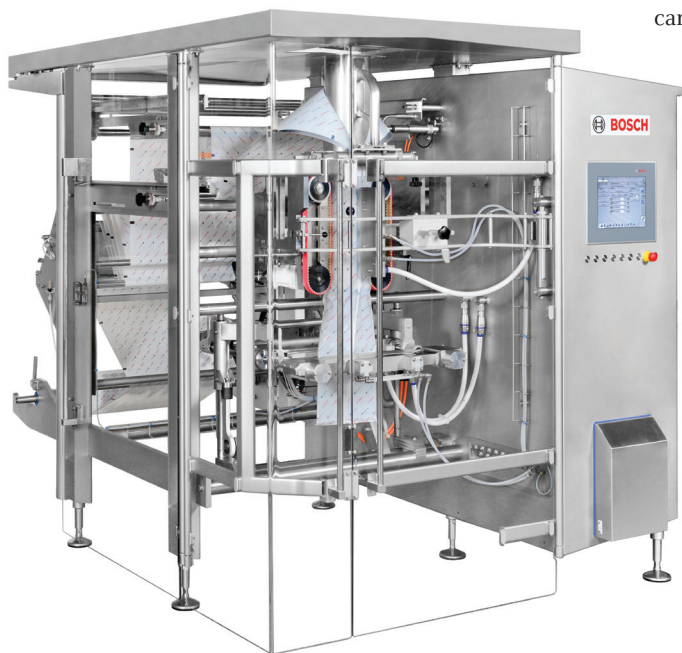
Sabert has since expanded its line to include 4-inch square deli tubs for cold food applications, she said, and plans to introduce a line of rectangular containers in June.

"The demand for healthy eating with fresh-cut fruits and vegetable is going through the roof," Dykstra said.

Coupled with concerns about food safety, the new containers are "a natural fit," she said.

Kurt Zuhlke & Associates

Kurt Zuhlke & Associates Inc.,



Courtesy Bosch Packaging Technology Inc.

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