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**FARM GROWN EXPANSION THANKS TO ISHIDA AUTOMATED SNACKS LINE**

The installation of a bespoke complete snacks packaging line from Ishida has enabled a family-owned premium crisp manufacturer to utilise the benefits of automation to meet continuing growing demand for its products.

Owned and managed by third-generation farmers, the Stratherns, Fairfields Farm began manufacturing crisps in 2006 using potatoes grown on the farm. Since then, a fastidious approach to quality, both in potato selection and production methods, has seen the brand go from strength to strength supplying crisps to a wide variety of foodservice and specialist retail outlets across the UK.

Fairfields Farm's specialist focus on independent retailers sets the brand apart from its supermarket supplying competitors and has helped contribute to its continuing success with recent sales volume growth of over 40% in the past year.

This led the company to approach Ishida to install a new automated packaging line to support its existing operation, which had become too slow and labour intensive to cope with the increased production requirements.

The decision to select Ishida for the project was borne out of Fairfields Farm’s longstanding reputation for quality and service, as Simon Heard, the company’s Operations Director explained:

“Quality is central to every stage of our production – from the potatoes we choose for our crisps to the machines on our lines. I was aware of Ishida and their capabilities from my 30 years of food production experience, so when it came to selecting a supplier, they were our clear choice.”

The aftercare provided by Ishida was also a major contributing factor.

“Ishida offers a level of support that its competitors simply do not,” said Simon. “As an example, we needed an urgent replacement belt on the line and Ishida was able to deliver the part on the same day”.

Space is at a premium in Fairfields Farm’s manufacturing facility so the compact footprint of the line was another key benefit.

The complete packaging line from Ishida now runs in parallel with an existing line comprising multihead weigher, bagmaker and manual case packing – with the old line mostly handling larger pack sizes where line speed is not as critical.

The new fully automated Ishida line comprises an RV series 14-head multihead weigher, INSPIRA bagmaker, sealtester, checkweigher and the ACP-711 Automatic Casepacker, and was installed at the Fairfields Farm production facility in February 2022.

Since installation, the company has reaped the benefits of automation and seen a significant increase in output, enhanced quality control and more efficient staff deployment.

The new Ishida multihead weigher and bagmaker combination handles bag sizes from 25g to 150g up to 120 packs per minute, delivering a 50% increase in speed. Weighing accuracy is within 4% of the optimum target weight significantly reducing product giveaway on the most popular 40g size, a notable enhancement considering that an individual crisp can weigh as much as 1.3g.

One of the major benefits of the Ishida casepacker is its ability to keep up with the fast pace of the rest of the line. And as an automated operation, this has enabled factory personnel to be re-utilised elsewhere.

“With manual casepacking, we would typically have two or three people at the end of the line,” explained Simon. “With the installation of the Ishida ACP casepacker, these workers were freed up which made the addition of an extra shift to meet the increased demand that much easier.”

Fast changeovers are a further advantage of the Ishida equipment. For example, easy removal of the hoppers on the CCW-RV-214 facilitates fast cleaning of the weigher during flavour changes, while the casepacker can be quickly switched between case formats at the touch of a button.

Fairfields Farm’s commitment to quality has been further enhanced by the addition of the Ishida sealtester and checkweigher, ensuring that any out-of-spec packs are rejected from the line. The seal tester can also measure and feed-back air-fill data directly to the bagmaker, allowing automatic adjustment of the bagmaker operation to maintain a constant pack thickness, which ensures a smoother and more efficient case packing operation.

The ease of set-up, changeovers and user-friendliness of the Ishida systems are further advantages, with Simon highlighting the simplicity of the INSPIRA’s operation as a particular example.

“The INSPIRA’s screen is clear and makes it really easy to understand any issues that arise and how to solve them. That and the combination of different languages available on the display aids the rapid training of a diverse range of staff,” he explained.

The complete packing line at Fairfields Farm is at the heart of the company’s five-year expansion plan and the company expects to see a return on investment within two and a half years.

**Ends**

**About Fairfields Farm Crisps:**

Fairfields Farm is a family farm on the Essex and Suffolk border owned by Robert and Laura Strathern. Fairfields grow the potatoes, then hand cook the thick-cut (vegan and gluten free) crisps on site. It’s a field-to-farm gate story that few other crisp producers can claim. Fairfields Farm Crisps do not sell to supermarkets, which helps to make them feel like a special treat.

Fairfields are aware that, if they want to keep growing crops and making crisps in the years to come, they need to look after the land. That’s why they have a number of sustainability initiatives at the farm, including biocrop production, reservoir management, tree and hedgerow planting schemes and land set aside for wild birds and pollinators. Fairfields are well on their way of becoming carbon neutral, as well as targeting net zero, by 2030.

**Notes to editors:**

Ishida is a world leader in the design, manufacture and installation of complete weighing, packing and inspection solutions for the food industry, helping manufacturers increase automation, reduce cost and downtime, increase operational efficiencies and maximise profits.

With an installed global base well in excess of 100,000 industrial machines, covering a huge number of applications and end markets, the company is the undisputed world market leader for multihead weighers and one of the leading global suppliers of snack food bagmakers, graders, traysealers, X-ray inspection systems, checkweighers, leak detectors and Industry 4.0 solutions.

This extensive product range, along with the company’s in-depth knowledge and experience of many industries, mean that Ishida is able to design and install complete turnkey solutions for markets such as snacks and other dry foods, meat, poultry, fish, dairy, ready meals and fresh produce.

The company’s vision is to play an enduring and indispensable role in the global food supply chain, ensuring food products are delivered and consumed safely, efficiently and sustainably around the world.

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