

Date: Feb 1, 2010; Section: Front Page; Page: 104

CASE STUDY

Environmentally Tied

With the push for environmental consciousness, Pan-O-Gold expands its mandate for reducing its ecological impact.

BY STEVE BERNE

In times of economic challenge, companies' efforts toward environmental stewardship can wane and take a back seat to cost-cutting measures and bottom-line improvement. However, when a company's core philosophy is green-minded, "reduce/reuse/recycle" can be a positive selling point and enhance the company's stature in the marketplace.

Pan-O-Gold, St. Cloud, MN, is a family-owned company that dates back to the 1800s. Its state-of-the-art bakeries at St. Cloud, Fargo, ND, and Sun Prairie, WI, make wholesale and retail breads, buns, bagels, muffins, donuts and rolls for grocers, restaurants, supermarkets and distributors all across the Midwest — a territory that includes nine states.

"The company has always been concerned with the environment," said Robin Alton, president and c.e.o., Pan-O-Gold. "We have won state and national awards for our efforts in recycling waste and reducing energy use. We focus our energy savings internally, and we encourage our consumers to do the same. We try to do our part any way we can." Successful efforts include lighting changes within all its bakeries, energy-efficient motors, corn-based ethanol and clean burning efficient diesel engines in its supervisory vans and delivery trucks, respectively, as well as using wind energy credits for a portion of its operating needs.

While the company does not feel the need to exploit all of its efforts, it does promote its bread bags' recyclability with a statement on the back of its bread package encouraging consumers to recycle the empty bags along with their grocery bags. Recently, with the help of Bedford Industries, Worthington, MN, Pan-O-Gold took these environmentally conscious efforts one step further.

Last year, Bedford introduced a biodegradable twist tie with the same functionality as its regular style. Recent mandates from mass merchandisers and awareness from consumers are pressing bakers to be more sustainable in their practices and materials. These were part of the catalysts for Bedford to develop this innovation. "Our company philosophy is to be as green as possible," Mr. Alton added. "The biodegradable twist ties fit into that philosophy. It is good for our customers, consumers and the environment."

Printable and available in different colors, the twist tie has been tested and certified to ASTM D5511 standards, which tests for biodegradation in anaerobic conditions such as landfills. Details of the standard can be found at www.astm.org/Standards/D5511.htm.

The twist tie is made of paper, plastic, wire originally produced from natural iron ore resources and a proprietary additive. Biodegradability of the ties is not affected by sunlight or moisture so they will not prematurely degrade on the store shelf, according to the supplier. Further, 90% of the wire originates from post-consumer or post-industrial waste.

Performance and physical properties are identical to conventional ties, and no adjustments are required when used on machines such as a Burford Twist Tye. Bedford is currently in the midst of the 9-month process of achieving ASTM D6400 certification for the ties, which is the standard used in Europe as well as California. Go to www.astm.org/Standards/D6400.htm for details of this standard.

"We started using the new ties last July with no adverse effect on operations," Mr. Alton said. Pan-O-Gold added a biodegradability statement on its bread packaging just below the bags recyclability declaration. Pan-O-Gold sells its products under many different brand names including Country Hearth and Village Hearth. "Our product line includes all-natural variety breads, including wholewheat, white-wheat, Italian and cottage breads," Mr. Alton said. "We also provide a full line of private-label breads and bun products to supermarkets throughout the upper Midwest."

More information on the biodegradable twist ties can be found at www.bedfordind.com or by contacting the company by phone at (877) 233-3673 or e-mail at bedford@bedfordind.com.



- Pan-O-Gold's Country Hearth bread prominently displays the recycling and biodegradable tie information on the back of each bread bag.

BEDFORD INDUSTRIES