



On the **Leading** Edge

This year's Pack Expo in Chicago offered an overview of the latest trends and developments in packaging machinery and products

Pack Expo 2007, which took place this year in conjunction with Process Expo from Oct. 29 to Nov. 2 at Chicago's McCormick Place, was the place to discover everything there is to know about new packaging trends. Hosted by the Packaging Machinery Manufacturers Institute and the Food Processing Suppliers Association, the biennial trade show again highlighted equipment, systems and technologies that are changing the face of the food packaging and processing industry. Following are just a few of the trends evident at the show.

EQUIPMENT

- **Flexibility** – More equipment is available with a smaller footprint, making it more affordable and adaptable for lower-output producers. Also benefiting are large-scale producers interested in small-batch processing of specialty products. At the same time equipment has become increasingly adaptable to accommodate different product weights, quantities and sizes through simple modifications, again recognizing the needs of smaller food producers, and to allow greater product flexibility. For example, Unique Solutions was highlighting its more compact, higher-speed US1000 PouchPlus Elite, touting it as 25-per-cent faster and 20-per-cent smaller than its other models.
- **Efficiency** – Automated production lines are making processing and packaging easier to control, less labour-intensive and more standardized. Of course, the goal is always increased output with greater efficiency. Highlighting this fact was Reiser's new Supervac GK 830B/840B Series High Performance Vacuum Packaging Machines, which feature simple touch control, and can drastically increase output while cutting labour requirements by 50 per cent. The Contiform S20 stretch blow moulder from Krones, Inc. also brings high-speed process technology to the production line, with fast changeover time and reduced maintenance downtime.
- **Energy saving** – Equipment manufacturers may be thinking green with the new energy-saving units now on the market, but for food and beverage manufacturers the focus is on cost savings and increased efficiency. Multivac's Belted

Chamber System and Shrink Tunnel, for instance, saves producers up to 65 per cent on power and water consumption by recirculating heat and steam.

- **Safety and Sanitation** – As concerns about food safety heighten, manufacturers are responding with machinery that is easier to disassemble, clean and keep sanitized. Less labour requirements and greater worker safety is an added bonus on these units, which are designed to ensure safety protocols are less difficult and more convenient to follow. For example, all Rychiger's Filling and Sealing machines include easy-clean features that make sanitizing effortless.

PACKAGING:

- **Convenience** – Today's consumers are demanding packaging that is easy to remove, versatile, attractive and portable. A good example are the products shown at Pack Expo by Printpack, Inc., including the distinctive and versatile seven-layer polypropylene/ethylene container developed for Beneful pet food. The packaging is rugged and reusable with a snap-on lid.
- **Environmentally friendly** – Environmental concerns have led food producers to reconsider the type and quantity of packaging they use. As a result, film wrap and packaging that is recyclable and/or composed of recycled material was strongly represented at this year's Pack Expo. Products that stood out were the range of new Pentafood Multi-Layer Films and Pentafood Freezer-to-Microwave Films from Klöckner Pentaplast. Its SmartCycle 150 PETE films in particular contain a minimum content of 50 per cent post-consumer recycled plastic bottles.
- **Safety** – Increasing awareness of food safety and quality issues have made tamper-evident packaging more important to consumers, as has packaging that keeps out contaminants. One product that fits the bill is Ampac Flexibles' standup flexible pouch developed for Wasatech IceWater Co., which features an inner valve and Seaquist Closures' EZ Turn cap to prevent contaminants from getting into the product.

FEELING CREATIVE?

See how your packaging innovations stand up to the competition at the Packaging Association of Canada's (PAC) 2007 National Packaging Competition. This year's categories include brand marketing, decorated corrugated fibreboard, flexible packaging, labels, paperboard packaging, point of purchase and rigid/semi-rigid containers. Entry forms must be submitted by Jan. 22, with all samples submitted by Jan. 26, 2007. Judging takes place Jan. 27, with the awards presented at a gala ceremony on April 17, 2007. All entries will be on display during PACex International, May 8 to 10, 2007 at the Direct Energy Centre in Toronto. For more information visit the PAC website at www.pac.ca/events/event_npc2.html