

Bischofszell Foods Says 'No News is Good News'



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Ask any veteran in the food processing industry about the biggest change they've seen during their career and you'll probably receive the same answer every time: automation. Oscar Forster, Department Manager for the French Fry Department at Bischofszell Food Ltd. in Bishofszell, Switzerland, has seen the progression in automation first-hand in his 21 years with the company, especially when it comes to grading potatoes.

Bischofszell Food has expanded its product line considerably during its 90-plus-year history. The company started with just two products and today processes more than 1,100. As Bischofszell's product offerings increased, its commitment to processing food products with state-of-the-art technology remained the same.

In the potato grading process, the company's latest technology upgrade involved a [Farmco Sliver Sizer-Remover \(SSR\)](#) from [Key Technology](#).

The SSR is a unique rotary-style machine that transfers potato strips and separates/removes slivers leftover from the cutting process using a series of precision-machined stainless steel rollers. Slivers are pulled through the rollers and exits beneath the machine while whole potato strips move on to downstream equipment over the tops of the rollers.

SSR's like the Farmco unit were not available at the beginning of Forster's career. "Before the roller sorters, we used a machine that was originally made for the green bean industry (to grade potatoes). Then when the roller sorters came out, we switched. They were easier to maintain and they did a much better job of sorting out slivers."

But as Bischofszell's potato product offerings expanded, demands on the size grading equipment increased. "Because the graders also were needed in our hashed brown line, for example, we needed to sort out even smaller pieces. We needed versatility," Forster says.

The size grading equipment Bischofszell had at the time wasn't designed for these new processing requirements because the rollers were made of plastic so tolerances couldn't be easily adjusted. "Finally, we found a solution with Farmco," says Forster. "Tolerances are much tighter because the rollers are made of steel. You can move them much closer together."

After consulting with their Farmco representative, Bischofszell redesigned the potato grading process. "We solved the problem together," says Forster. The SSR is

installed after the original roller grader to further size and separate the potato product for improved product quality.

Operators can adjust the Farmco unit during operation to fine-tune the size for separation or removal. Changeover from one product or cut to another is fast and easy with very little downtime.

No matter what size of potato strip is being processed, the SSR offers precise, consistent sizing. The "stirring" action of the rotary bed achieves precise and efficient sizing and separation with efficiencies up to 95 percent.

After nearly five years of operation, the Farmco unit is performing up to Bishofszell's expectations with only routine maintenance, a fact that pleases Herbert Zoller, Technical Manager for Special Processing, which among other processes oversees the French fry line. "The SSR has been performing very well. We don't have any problems with the maintenance."

The Farmco SSR is easy to use and maintain. An easy-to-remove side cover and plastic liner offer easy access to bearings, sprockets and the adjusting system.

Further, Bishofszell sees less downtime in the grading process since the Farmco SSR unit is self-cleaning. Thorough cleanings require only a hose wash-down. There are no slats to remove, no screens to change and no parts to remove.

So when you ask Zoller what he knows about any maintenance issues with the Farmco SSR, he says that no news is good news. "Mostly it's normal maintenance, like replacing bearings. But it is so rare that I never hear about it. If it had a bigger problem, the chief of maintenance would inform me. In terms of service, we haven't needed Key."

