



COVER STORY

MAKING DOUGH BY THE BAGFUL

Ontario producer of frozen perogies counting on robust, made-in-Canada packaging machinery to help it corner the market for flavorful and nutritious culinary creations

Sometimes, words like tasty and nutritious simply don't do justice for some unique food products that cause your tastebuds to go into overdrive at the very first bite. Products such as the delicious filled dumplings produced by folks at the small, family-owned **Supreme Pierogies Inc.** factory tucked away on the northeastern outskirts of the thriving city of Mississauga, Ont., a short drive west of Toronto.

As the company name suggests, making perogies—a traditional Eastern European staple of crescent-shaped dumplings stuffed with flavorful fillings and seasonings—has been Supreme Pierogies' bread-and-butter product for the last 12 years, during which the tasty, award-winning tidbits have continued to find new markets and customers across North America.

"We think we make the best-tasting perogies in the world," Joe Wilk, the affable company founder told *Canadian Packaging* on a recent visit to the company's newly-opened, 7,000-square-foot second production facility, which Wilk explains was urgently needed because its older, 3,000-square-foot plant just could not handle the growing volumes.

"But we make more than your typical cheese perogy," the Polish-born Wilk quickly points out. "We also make 12 other varieties for a taste everyone can enjoy.

"We also make our perogies with meat, cottage cheese and potatoes, sauerkraut and mushrooms, cheddar cheese and broccoli, sauerkraut and meat, cheddar cheese and bacon, potato and onion, tortellini and mushrooms, tortellini with meat, and our special dessert perogies: sweet cheese, strawberry and blueberry."

BUSY BUSINESS

Before opening up the new facility a couple of months ago, Wilk says he had to keep the older plant running flat-out, on 24/7-schedule, in order to be able to keep up with the orders.

"We still use the smaller place to make our dessert perogies, because we have to make those by hand," says Wilk, adding that the new processing and packaging machinery purchased for the second facility will allow him to take a break from running a virtually non-stop operation.

In basic terms, perogies are made by cutting the pre-made, tender dough into crescent shapes and stuffing them into with the selected filling recipe, Wilk explains, after which they are frozen to a temperature that maximizes the freshness and the shelf-life of both the filling and the dough.

Some of the new processing machinery he purchased to go into the new plant, expands Wilk, features a patented method of operation that closely simulates the manual, by-hand preparation steps still done at the older plant.



Supreme Pierogies owner Joe Wilk says the company is poised to double its output capacity this fall with installation of more Canadian-made packaging machinery from WeighPack Systems.

In the new facility, after the perogies are formed, cooked and cooled through the new processing equipment line, they are transferred via a conveyor belt to the adjoining freezer room, where they are quickly frozen to the desired state as they move along a serpentine conveyor system.

"After the perogies get their central ingredient squeezed in, it's transferred into a rotating oven for about five minutes," explains Artur Szerszen, one of the Supreme Pierogies production line workers. "After it's all cooled and frozen, it gets packaged and boxed.

"It only takes about 45 minutes from start to finish for us," Szerszen adds.

A good part of the credit for the relatively speedy turnaround from raw dough to the completely finished package should go to the robust and efficient packaging machinery supplied to the new plant by **WeighPack Systems Inc.**, Montreal-based builder of vertical form/fill/seal (VFFS) equipment and integrator of weighing and scaling systems for food

industry applications.

Once they are properly frozen, the perogies are fed into a hopper attached to a WeighPack infeed inclined conveyor, which exits the freezer room and moves up at a 60-degree angle—making its way to the infeed hopper attached to the WeighPack weigh scale, explains WeighPack territory manager Colin Edwards.

"The V-9 model four-head weigh scale is a vibrating linear scale that provides positive product flow, which means, in this case, that it moves the perogies forward from the hopper to the weigh buckets," expands Edwards. "The combination of several transfer pans, and the bulk-and-dribble format, provides great accuracy."

The scale is controlled by the **Multi-Trix** controller, which utilizes dual microprocessors that offer stored calibration values, auto-start, large digital displays, and over 100 stored package menu settings.

SMOOTH OPERATOR

According to Edwards, this configuration is capable of running up to 50 cycles per minute in a smooth operation, whereby the operator simply keys in the required package weight through the menu selection screen, and the controller then automatically adjusts all the control variables systems to handle the new product.

"You just have to press the start button, and the Multi-Trix controller sets the transfer pans vibrating at the correct speed to provide an excellent final package weigh accuracy as the product enters the weigh buckets," says Edwards.

Once the defined target weight of 500 grams is achieved, the weigh buckets open up and dispense the product through a funnel into the

separate **Vertek 1150** VFFS automatic bagger system.

Designed to handle a wide range of bag sizes at up to 50 bags per minute, the **Vertek** model purchased by Supreme Pierogies is a 30-degree slant version that is configured specifically to reduce the impact of the vertical drop, which could dent or chip off the edges of the frozen perogies.

This **Vertek 1150** machine employs rolls of plastic film supplied by Mississauga, Ont.-based polyethylene

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The recently-installed WeighPack VFFS machine and related packing equipment enable Supreme to bag up to 35,000 perogies per hour.



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bags producer **AccuBag Inc.**,—moving the film through a series of rollers and over a bag-forming assembly, where it produces both the bottom and back seals in one swift step.

"It's been a pleasure doing business with Supreme Pierogies, as their business has been going good for us," comments AccuBag president Ed Bleka. "We've been growing rapidly, like Supreme, but when they expand their business this autumn, we will have to grow with them in order to be able to supply twice as much film for their bagger."

Once the perogies are dispensed from the scale down into the just-made bag, as commanded via the integrated system communications, the top of the bag is securely sealed, and the finished bags are then

dropped down onto an exit conveyor.

Before then, however, a continuous inkjet system—made by German manufacturer **EBS Ink Jet Systems GmbH**—is used to apply lot and date codes to the outside of the film layer used to form an assembly collar for each bag.

"The EBS machine we sold to Supreme Pierogies is an EBS-6100 model, which is the electric version of the air-driven 6000 system," says Chris Nemeth, co-owner and president of Oakville, Ont.-based **Resolution Inplant Services**, a supplier of inkjet equipment and consumables and the Canadian distributor for EBS Ink Jet.

"It is the most efficient CIJ (continuous inkjet)



An inline Fortress metal detection system doing final quality control inspection on the passing 500-gram bags of frozen perogies.

system on the market, and though it is small in stature—only 16 kilograms when fully inked-up—it has quite an impressive array of capabilities," says Nemeth, citing the electric model's superior character legibility, easy operator set-up, and helpful features such as automatic date and time rollover.

FINAL EXIT

The exit conveyor eventually directs the filled bags of perogies through a metal detection station, featuring a **Fortress** metal detector, and on to the rotating, circular accumulation table.

There, the rest of the plant staff manually load the filled bags into the shipping cartons, which then begin

their final journey to the company's continuously growing list of happy clients, now including the likes of high-profile grocery chains such as **Bruno's Fine Foods**, **Sun Valley Fine Foods**, **Longos**, **Galati Bros. Supermarkets** and **Costco**.

"We've been doing quite well lately," says Wilk. "Our perogies are low in fat but high in taste, and they also have a nice, thin-and-tender dough, thanks to the del-



Joe Wilk says WeighPack territory manager Colin Edwards (right) has provided invaluable input in getting maximum performance from the recently-installed packaging machinery.

icate production processes at our plants.

"I really don't think any other brand can compare."

And as far as competition in general goes, Wilk is sure that Supreme Pierogies will leave it even further behind once the company doubles its current weekly capacity of 500,000 pounds with addition of a second production line by October of this year.

"We'll be putting in a second full production line, complete with another WeighPack inclined infeed conveyor, a V-9 weigh scale with four heads, and a Vertek 1150 VFFS&S bagger from my good friend Colin Edwards," Wilk states. "So while 2005 is going to be a great year for us, we expect 2006 to be even better." □

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