

Success Story

Lean Solutions

Welch Foods, Inc.

Leaning Towards Profitability

Welch's, a household brand leader since 1869, is the world's leading marketer of Concord and Niagara-based grape products.

The company's Lawton, Michigan plant, located in the southwest side of the state, employs over 100 workers. Employees at the facility actively practice Lean manufacturing principles in the receiving, processing and storing of over 15 million gallons of juice via tankers and rail cars. Those practices are also implemented through the company's bulk juice batching and filtering processes that produces Sparking juices and fills 60,000 square feet of dry storage.



The Problem

In 2012, Welch Foods in Lawton engaged the services of MMTC-West to complete a Lean Implementation Training program to improve the efficiency of the company's palletizing line. Those improvements led to a 50% improvement in efficiency and a 30% overall plant improvement, demonstrating the value of Lean practices. This led to the decision by the Welch's management team to leverage previous lean efforts to improve personal ownership of the entire lean process, reduce line downtime, clarify roles/responsibilities and improve productivity.



After meeting with the company, MMTC representatives were informed that customer delivery requirements, on one of the company's packaging lines, were not meeting expectations. The packaging team for the company's "Sparkling Line" was struggling to make 90 pallets per shift using 11 people. This equated to 8.18 pallets per team member per shift period.

Leveraging previous knowledge gained from past lean efforts, it was estimated that the "Sparkling Line" had the potential to improve overall performance and gain 15-20% in added efficiencies.

The Solution

Once the problem was clearly defined, an objective was set to build the knowledge and skills of Welch's managers/supervisors and employees in the application of lean principles to the "Sparkle Line" and custom pallet line. MMTC facilitators recommended and implementation of a series of Kaizen tools to optimize workflow.

MMTC-West worked with Welch's to implement the project plans for improving the sparkling line and custom pallet line operations. The approach to implementation includes:

“These techniques improved performance and retained work at the Lawton facility. Performance has remained high and we continue to produce at the improved rates.”

Tom Barbarini, Operations Manager

1. Sparkling Line Analysis/Training/Coaching:

- Analyze sparkling line operations for work content
- Work with operators and supervisors to outline roles and responsibilities
- Document standard work for operators and supervisors
- Document standard work for line layout & operations
- Establish visual controls as necessary to support standard work
- Train/Coach operators on standard work
- Train/Coach supervisors on leader standard work

- Create team meeting standard agenda along with metrics/issues to track to drive improvement
- Coach supervisors on how to conduct team meetings for continuous improvement and their role in sustaining gains

2. Management Team Training/Coaching:

- Work with management team to outline roles and responsibilities that support the lean implementation
- Guide managers on documenting leader standard work
- Establish visual controls as necessary to support standard work
- Train/Coach managers on implementing leader standard work
- Advise managers on how to conduct coaching sessions with supervisors to support lean efforts
- Coach managers on how to establish a culture of continuous improvement

Results

The lean implementation for changes and improvements resulted in

- 140 pallets per shift consistently using 11 people. This equates to 12.73 pallets per team member per shift period. The result is a 55.6% improvement in throughput capability.
- Eventually reached peak levels at times of 150-160 pallets per shift.
 - o This potential represents 14.1 pallets per team member per shift period and a 72% improvement.
 - o Additionally safety and quality improvements were realized while reducing downtime due to knife cutting and improved quality of the final pack.
- Welch's established standard work using Operator Balance Charts to streamline the workflow, slowing down the conveyor line down to get more throughput. The team realized through the lean training they were pushing a lot of waste around previously with a lot of hard work. The company changed its thinking from work harder not smarter to “work smarter, not harder”.

