

WHERE INNOVATION AND FOOD SAFETY MEET

For over two decades MPJ has seen how the commercial fishing industry uses ultra-tough plastic containers and tubs to harvest, store, and transport seafood in harsh weather and heavy sea conditions that put material and employees to the test. But, we have seldom seen the same usage in meat/poultry plants, that instead rely on either flimsy plastic containers, cardboard, or dangerous and difficult to work with steel bins. We have teamed up with Saeplast – which every fisherman knows – to prepare this report.

Not all material handling options are meeting all your needs for food and employee safety. The road to assuring to our customers that we meet all their food safety demands intersects with employee safety and controlling costs. The road comes to a common point. There is a delicate balance where we need to focus to meet all three effectively. It becomes a company's daily emphasis to be able to offer its customers the most food-safe quality products while keeping the health and welfare of its employees in check with the demands of the costs of processing.

Have you really looked at the material handling aspect of moving your valuable protein product within the plant? Unfortunately, many today simply try to minimize costs as much as possible while keeping food safety top of mind. But then the employees suffer. Almost always, the cheapest material handling vessel is the low-priced option chosen from a short-term transactional point of view. But, it doesn't check all the boxes for maintaining food safety or being the most user friendly for your employees. Most times the inexpensive option doesn't stand up to the long-term cost of acquisition and payback that you require.

◆ Have a look around your plant, are you using the most food safe and employee safe material handling

product to move your valued food around?

- ◆ Do you use corrugated gaylords on top of wooden pallets with plastic poly bags inside?
- ◆ Do you use heavy steel bins and buggies that are difficult to move, sanitize, repair, and are a danger to your employees?
- ◆ Are you using plastic single wall products that are easily broken and have crevices that harbor bacteria that prove unsafe for your employees and your food product?
- ◆ Do you utilize one-use poly bags in your process that have become a necessary cost for your operation?

If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, you need to look at alternative ways to contain your quality and be food and employee safe. With the cost of replacing broken product each year, along with the purchase of new items for operational needs, a close-up review needs to be taken at this constant cost expenditure.

With sanitation issues, pathogen contamination, constant breaking and associated foreign particle risks, there is no wonder that plastics are becoming the standard in processing plants. However, not all vats, containers, pallets and buggies are the same. Yes, they are all material handling vessels, but all have drastically different impacts and risks associated with each of them. For these reasons MPJ and Saeplast would recommend a material handling audit of your facility before your next purchase.

Unfortunately for many processing companies, it's the procurement and accounting office bean-counters who decide what type of material handling products to buy and not the quality manager, plant manager, or complex manager.

Understandable, anyone who looks at figures all day or simply looks at lowest transactional cost is in for some sticker shock. However, when a customer plans on using a product repeatedly, the product needs to be considered an asset – something that is owned by and gives value to the company – and not an expense. Because of this, the return on investment needs to be the key driver – not the initial cost or transactional price. For example, figuring that a cheap injection molded plastic container costing \$400 will need to be replaced every one to two years – suddenly, the costlier \$900 container that is proven to last six to eight years seems like a bargain.



More expensive proves cheaper

West Liberty Foods is a US meat processing company owned by the Iowa Turkey Growers Cooperative. Formed in 1996 by a group of Iowa turkey growers, the progressive company now owns five meat processing plants, mainly producing products for customers to sell under their own brand names. As of 2015, West Liberty Foods was the 10th-largest turkey company in the United States.

The company had converted to plastic injection molded containers and pallets in 2010 as part of their commitment to food safety. It was felt that pallets and containers made from high density polyethylene would mitigate the risk of bacterial cross contamination in food products. While this is true, the inferior plastic single wall products that the company bought proved to be brittle and difficult to sanitize.

According to Rick Lindsay of West Liberty Foods, these pallets and containers proved to be a high cost solution due to their lack of durability. "Every week we lost several pallets and bins to breakage," he says. "In mid-year 2012, we converted to Saeplast rotationally molded pallets and triple wall polyethylene containers. Both products have performed exceptionally well over the last seven years."

Upon further investigation with West Liberty Foods, the Saeplast triple-wall one-piece design provides an extremely long life as opposed to any of the other containers used in the past. "These containers have proved to be superior in all aspects especially in sanitation. We use substantially less labor and much

CHOOSING YOUR CONTAINERS

MPJ recommends these key considerations to be taken when choosing the best fit for your plant:

- ◆ Is a long-life container that optimizes food safety a high consideration?
- ◆ Is safe stacking that saves valuable floor space important?
- ◆ Will raw material come in direct contact with the containers?
- ◆ Is ease of cleaning and sanitizing needed?
- ◆ Is there an advantage to eliminating poly bags at your plant?
- ◆ Will the containers be easy to clean to ensure bacteria will not be harbored?
- ◆ What part of the plant will the containers be in?
- ◆ Is there a height restriction to ensure the container fits within your existing processing equipment?
- ◆ Will the containers be subjected to very low temperatures in a freezer?
- ◆ Will the containers be travelling between company plants and/or other plants?



less water and chemicals to sanitize our vats and return to the floor", says Lindsay. The fact the containers are easy to move around the plant is a huge benefit to the employees' safety. No more cuts, strains or other injuries.

Furthermore, the closed cell inner core will not absorb liquid, thus optimizing hygiene and providing the most food safe container. This triple wall design with the special inner core is extremely durable and easy to repair.

To conform to West Liberty Foods' 2012 Landfill Free initiatives, the Saeplast containers eliminated the need for plastic poly bags as the Saeplast containers' plastic is made from 100% food grade materials. The elimination of poly bags proved both a benefit to the Landfill Free commitment and to the food safety concerns of foreign particle contamination. The savings in purchase costs and more importantly, operational costs were realized as well.

Finally, the ability to safely stack the Saeplast containers three high in the coolers has saved West Liberty Foods valuable floor space and has also delayed the need for further expansion of the coolers. By eliminating the requirement to stack only one container high, West Liberty Foods has freed up two spaces for

every stack of three Saeplast containers. The inter-locking feature of the Saeplast containers that allows for safe and easy stacking has proven to be advantageous to the safety of the employees of West Liberty Foods.

"Yes, it is true the purchase price is significantly greater, but the total cost of acquisition is significantly lower than any other option we have either tried or analyzed," advises Lindsay.

When considering the best alternative for material handling your food product in your plant, you should consider looking for a partner supplier who can offer you the lowest total cost of acquisition over the long haul instead of purchasing the cheapest alternative.

Be mindful of your goal of ensuring total food safety of your food product along with considering taking care of one of your most valuable assets – your employees. The cheapest option never offers the best results long term. Keep the focus on long term solutions.

As West Liberty Foods has proven, there are products available that offer the best return on your investment while keeping long term costs to a minimum and ensuring food and employee safety.