Supply Chain Stability and Adaptability Program

New Technology Supports Production of Innovative Local Bacon Product

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AGRICULTURAL ADAPTATION COUNCIL

Ontario

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A Canadian-owned meat processor based in Ontario is using technology to bring an innovative new dry rub bacon product to market. Leadbetter Foods' premium bacon is made with an automated curing process combined with a specialized algorithm that ensures perfect flavour and curing throughout the entire muscle.

Its previous batch curing brine injection and batch vacuum tumbling process was labour-intensive with each batch requiring multiple steps, which limited production capacity particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when staffing shortages were an ongoing challenge for the company.

So, in order to grow its premium branded bacon offering, Leadbetter made a significant investment in upgrading and modernizing its infrastructure, supported by cost-share funding from the Supply Chain Stability and Adaptability Program.

"We wanted to introduce this new-to-market premium artisanal dry rub bacon while doubling capacity, lowering costs and automating the process as well as using less labour and generating less waste," explains Leadbetter Vice President Doug Alexander. "We successfully launched the product in 2023 and have now begun export market development in anticipation of sales in the United States by 2025."

In addition to the automated curing, the process also includes a continuous pass-through meat tumbler that ensures pepper and other flavorings are evenly distributed in an inline, fully automated continuous tumbling process.

Once the cure and flavour distribution are completed, the pork bellies are tempered and sliced with Leadbetter's new fully automated highspeed portion control slicing process, which was also part of the expansion project.

"Thanks to this new technology, we've been able to not just bring a new product to market, but also lower our operating cost and minimize our food waste with less product loss," Alexander adds. "This has resulted in new sales growth and improved competitiveness for Leadbetter Food product, while increasing the purchase of Ontario-produced pork. Long-term, we have the capacity to double our demand for pork produced right here in Ontario."

Alexander notes that the funding was invaluable to the company, helping attract additional investment in a tough market where competition for capital is fierce. And there are spin-off effects to the broader food supply chain in province as Leadbetter's leading source of both beef and pork are Ontario primary processing plants – who, in turn, buy from Ontario farmers.

"Any time there are public funds to support business growth, it helps attract investment," he says. "This improves the long-term viability of the business in a very competitive market."

Leadbetter Foods is a Canadian-owned meat processing company that was founded in 1926. With two federally inspected food processing plants in Orillia, the company produces bacon, steaks, burgers, sausages, peameal and other further processed beef and pork-based meat products.

The Supply Chain Stability and Adaptability Program is funded by the Government of Ontario to address supply chain challenges in the agri-food sector. The Agricultural Adaptation Council is delivering the program on behalf of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness.

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