

Innovating for Success: How StePac L.A. Ltd. is developing new packaging solutions to meet changing market needs

Interview with Gary Ward, Ph.D., Technical Development Manager for StePac L.A. Ltd.

Current market trends are driving the development of leaner, functional packaging with enhanced shelf life properties to reduce supply chain waste. StePac L.A. Ltd., with almost 25 years' experience in developing modified atmosphere packaging, is boosting investment to address the needs of this rapidly evolving market.

PSD: What is the key secret of your success?

GW: One of our key attributes is staying attentive to trends in the fresh produce market to understand where we should invest our R&D efforts to develop new and exciting products that bring value to our customers. A great example is StePac's Xgo™ resealable lidding film. It was developed as an ad-hoc solution to meet the requirements of Chilean cherry exporters and their Chinese customers.

Another example is Xflow™, a unique system for bulk-flow packing of fresh produce. Xflow meets the needs to reduce labor costs and provide leaner film specifications. Peruvian exporters of blueberries are now saving on both labor and film costs by automatically packing 12 clamshells with Xflow.

PSD: Explain the innovation in Xgo resealable lidding film

GW: We collaborated with Tadbik Ltd. to produce novel modified atmosphere resealable lidding film, engineered to extend the shelf life and reduce waste of fresh cherries. Tadbik created a "FreshLid" laminated film structure that seals to trays containing fresh produce. The upper layer can be repeatedly peeled back and resealed as needed. We worked to develop suitable condensation control properties and adjusted film permeability to deliver optimal modified atmosphere compositions for cherries. The beauty is that this product not only preserves quality during shipment, but also enhances the consumer experience since the modified atmosphere regenerates each time the film is resealed, thereby continuing to preserve fruit quality and enabling multiple servings.



PSD: What were the hurdles in implementing this project?

GW: Developing an aesthetically pleasing resealable packaging capable of preserving quality in cherries for 35 days or more is a big challenge requiring a multidisciplinary approach combining a profound understanding of the interaction between produce physiology, prevailing supply chain conditions, and packaging design to achieve extended shelf life.

PSD: Were the results of this effort successful?

GW: Absolutely! The success of this pilot project propelled increased interest in the use of the film by FRUSAN, a Chilean cherry exporter. It also created a ripple effect, expanding the use of this high-value solution among cherry packers and shippers. This, in turn, garnered interest from the blueberry industry.

Chinese importers are willing to pay premium prices for high-quality cherries and blueberries. This has stimulated growth in export of these fruits from Peru and Chile to China, and with it the need for attractive, functional packaging to preserve quality during the lengthy sea freight.



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