

StePac leads responsible supply chain with innovative packaging

High demand for cherries in China revs up need for functional packaging to extend shelf life and reduce waste

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Gary Ward, Ph.D., Technical Development Manager, StePac



StePac L.A. Ltd. is working closely with its partners to implement a comprehensive supply chain solution for the delivery of fresh cherries from farm-to-fork. The company has joined forces with Tadbik Ltd., Israel, to produce the next generation of modified atmosphere resealable lidding film.

The new technology is engineered to extend the shelf life of fresh cherries in aesthetic and functional retail packaging as well as reduce waste. **The product will be showcased at the upcoming Asia Fruit Logistica trade show in Hong Kong, September 5-7, 2018, Hall 5, booth #5038.**

In this collaboration Tadbik created a "FreshLid" laminated film structure that is sealed to trays containing fresh produce and whose upper layer can be repeatedly peeled back for reuse. The companies then worked together to develop suitable condensation control properties and control film permeability to deliver optimal modified atmosphere compositions (MAP) for high value fresh produce items such as cherries. This innovative packaging will be marketed under the Xgo® line, Stepac's leading retail brand.

Efforts to overcome common challenges in lengthy supply chains and to move toward more responsible and cost-effective delivery processes, is generating increased demand for advanced functional packaging solutions. Meeting these challenges is especially critical when it comes to preserving and extending fresh produce shelf life and reducing waste.

"Successful implementation of MAP requires a holistic approach that includes an understanding of post-harvest pathology, produce physiology, cold-chain logistics, and the interaction of each of these factors with packaging design," explains Gary Ward, Ph.D., Technical Development Manager for StePac.

This packaging design incorporates multiple capabilities to effectively slow respiration and ageing processes, and to control humidity inside the packaging and extend fresh produce shelf life. Following research and trials at StePac's post-harvest lab, the groundbreaking film was approved for shelf life extension of cherries.

Xgo resealable lidding film technology provides multiple benefits:

1. It preserves freshness and flavor during long sea shipments, prolonging the combined storage and transportation life of cherries to more than 35 days.
2. Consumers can enjoy the full taste of the cherries across multiple servings during extended home refrigerator life since the MAP mechanism is regenerated each time the film is resealed, thus continuing quality preservation.
3. It maintains its attractive packaging design throughout multiple uses.

In a pilot study, FRUSAN (Frutera San Fernando S.A.), a market leader in the Chilean cherry export market, shipped several refrigerated containers filled with cherries in 2.5kg trays and sealed with Xgo resealable lidding film to retailers in China, arriving in time for the Chinese New Year. Cherries are considered the perfect red-colored gift in Chinese tradition.

The success of this pilot project propelled increased interest in the use of the film by FRUSAN for the upcoming Chilean cherry season. 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.

StePac has expressed aspirations to expand its activity in the Asian market. "Chinese importers are willing to pay premium prices for high-quality cherries and blueberries," explains Ward. "This drives the growing 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."

StePac has been working with its distributors Fiamma (Peru) and Empack (Chile) to provide a comprehensive solution to its customers, offering valuable advice on post-harvest handling, conducting routine inspections in China and other destinations, and ensuring a fully controlled quality supply chain. The three companies also work together with their customers to understand market needs and deliver innovative solutions that bring value and differentiation.

About StePac

StePac specializes in functional packaging for fresh produce. Its brands include the globally recognized Xtend®, Xgo™, Xflow™ and Xbloom™ modified atmosphere / modified humidity packaging solutions. The company is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Johnson Matthey PLC.

About Tadbik

Tadbik is a world leader of advanced packaging solutions including Flexible Packaging, Labels, RFID, packaging machinery and in-pack promotion for over 30 years. Tadbik maintains facilities in the USA and Israel with highly skilled in-house design and engineering teams.

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