

CASE STUDY

Country Bob's relishes its 'steak' in IBCs

To jazz up its steak sauce, the bottler's special liquid concentrate from French's Flavor Ingredients arrives in 330-gal, bag-lined bulk totes that need no assembly, prevent the concentrate from settling and cut loading time and labor costs by up to 15 percent.

Lauren R. Hartman, Senior Editor – Packaging Digest, 5/1/2006

Overview

A saucy improvement to its bulk-packaging operations has given an important advantage to Country Bob, Inc., which uses ingredients from French's Flavor Ingredients to make a tangy, all-purpose sauce. Adopting the ReadyFill® intermediate bulk container (IBC) from International Paper's ReadyFill Systems Div. (www.readyfill.com) to ship the sauce ingredients has saved big in terms of labor and time, and it actually prevents the liquid concentrate ingredient from settling during shipment.

Country Bob Edson is a real person who, in 1968, perfected "the sauce of his dreams," after years of giving his homemade steak and burger sauce to friends and family. Edson began selling the all-purpose sauce in 1977 and in 1982, established Country Bob, Inc. in Centralia, IL. The company is dedicated to offering its great-tasting, quality All Purpose Steak Sauce, which is now available in 13-oz polyethylene terephthalate bottles among other containers. Today, Country Bob's distribution has magnified regionally. The sauce is available in the Midwest, the South and in most Wal-Mart Super Centers nationwide. The company also makes products including a barbecue sauce, a hot sauce and a seasoning salt.



Suitable for steak, burgers, other meats and French fries, the flavorful sauce is made with a liquid spice concentrate from French's Flavor Ingredients, Springfield, MO, a division of Reckitt Benckiser, Inc. The secret spice ingredient of the finished product formula now arrives in the 330-gal IBC. Country Bob's is able to mix it with other components inside the IBC and dispenses the blend for each batch into the rest of its sauce formulation prior to bottling. Without proper mixing, the seasonings in the concentrate can settle over time and in-transit, and may not be evenly dispersed in the product. Previously, Country Bob's used 55-gal drums to mix the concentrate ingredients prior to dispensing. That is, until it heard about the ability to mix the product in the larger, disposable, bag-in-box IBCs.

Objective

Country Bob's was interested in evaluating the bulk tote to reduce production costs and waste in its processing operation, as well as to facilitate mixing and prepare the sauce before bottling.

Strategy

IP worked with French's Flavor Ingredients to set up a trial demonstration of how to effectively mix the concentrate blend inside the bag-in-box IBC, recalls Mark Jones, general manager of International Paper's ReadyFill Systems. "It was a combined decision for the two companies to convert to IBCs," he says. "French's shared with us Country Bob's challenge, and as a result, we arranged a trial to demonstrate how to mix the product in an IBC. Country Bob's then trialed the ReadyFill IBCs in its own facility and, given the trial's success, wanted to make a change."

Capable of being stacked three-high, each of the ReadyFill IBCs has more than 30,000 lb of compression strength and is able to transport the equivalent of six 55-gal drums of product. The IBC, as its name implies, is ready-to-fill on arrival, bonded to a heat-treated pallet certified by the International Plant Protection Convention. Constructed of an outer shell incorporating eight to 10 plies of corrugated, the ReadyFill has an inner top cap from which a form-fitting polyethylene film liner is suspended and to which a fill spout is welded to facilitate hands-free filling. To fill the IBC, an operator removes the corrugated top cap and removes a newly improved tamper-evident seal with a tear-away tab on the top fill spout. The operator also removes a 2-in.-dia cap.

CASE STUDY

Industrial Segment

A fill hose is connected to the valve, or the operator can position a filling probe, and the filling process begins. The bag liner opens and expands inside the box. When the liner is full, the operator tightens the cap. The corrugated container is also fitted at the bottom side with a built-in ball valve with a tapered sump designed to facilitate product evacuation.

French's Flavor Ingredients uses a bag liner made of three plies of linear low-density polyethylene, though other liner structures are available, including those with metallized polyester or barrier ethylene vinyl alcohol layers. The filled IBC isn't banded to the pallet, but is covered with the corrugated overcap, secured with a protective, double-sided release tape.

Results

Since the switch was made last August, Country Bob's has reaped a 10- to 15-percent savings in labor. Says Reed Malekovic, vp of operations, "It takes less time to unload these containers from trucks, and there are fewer changeovers associated with the manufacturing process, so there's less downtime. We save about fifteen percent in mixing and setup."

Country Bob's now handles one container at a time instead of six, so saves time unloading. In addition, the collapsible IBCs save 50% in warehouse space and allow for a 28% decrease in floorspace where the product is stored, Malekovic says.

After mixing the liquid spice concentrate using a pneumatic liquid mixer, Country Bob's meters a precise amount of the blend for each batch from the IBC, which is pumped into a process kettle. Once in the kettle, it's mixed with the balance of sauce ingredients. Bottling of the finished sauce is then performed on an automated filling line.

"The move to this container has reduced storage space needs by about fifty percent, which has been an incredible benefit," Malekovic says. "Before we used the IBCs, we had to dump the concentrate into each batch using the drums. With the IBCs, we just set the metering controller to dispense a desired amount into each batch and walk away. We use one IBC per day of production and receive up to nine."

After the sauce is emptied from the container, the company removes the inner liner for disposal and collapses the corrugated outer container for recycling with other corrugated materials. Malekovic reports that French's Flavor Ingredients has experienced some improvements from moving to the IBCs, mainly due to reduced packaging and filling labor on their end. "We made them aware for a couple of years, that if the spice we purchase from them were available in an IBC, we'd buy it."

Because of the direct benefits ReadyFill offers French's Flavor Ingredients and its end users, French's Flavor Ingredients has converted all of its other tote requirements to the ReadyFill IBCs, according to Jones.

