



The recently-purchased WeighPack Xpdius Elite 800 bagger with incline infeed conveyor and CombiScale Primo Weigher has allowed Maywah Foods increase its production speeds to attract a growing customer base.



A Baldor washdown-duty motor powers a WeighPack conveyor moving filled bags of product onto a circular accumulator for packaging.



Standing in front of his new WeighPack packaging line, Ramesh Seegobin, owner of Maywah Foods, holds up a 150-gram bag of Mild Crunchy Pea Sticks snacks.

THE SPICE OF LIFE

Automated bagging equipment helps ethnic snack-food manufacturer boost output in step with growing market demand

Growing despite troubled economic times is no easy feat, but it just got a little easier a few months ago for **Maywah Foods Inc.**, a family-operated spice and specialty snack-food manufacturer whose recent investment in automated, high-performance, made-in-Canada bagging and checkweighing equipment has enabled the Brampton, Ont.-based company to finally bring its production levels up to par to fast-growing demand for its exotic product offerings.

“We eventually realized that if we were to grow our company in a meaningful way, we really needed to automate,” says Ramesh Seegobin, a full-time family physician and also the owner of a 20-year-old spice importing business whose recent diversification into ethnic foods production has reaped the rewards of a steadily-growing loyal customer base around the GTA (Greater Toronto Area) region and beyond.

“We import our spices from India, and we blend them using a very old and secret family recipe that has been handed down from generation to generation,” Seegobin told *Canadian Packaging* on a recent visit to the company’s modest 6,000-square-foot production facility, located about a half-hour drive north of Toronto, where it leverages the family’s close ties to its native Guyana to blend and package an assortment of spicy snacks such as plantain chips, roasted chick peas, fried chick peas, peanuts, and other similar taste sensations.

A couple of years ago, the company’s *Crunchy Pea Sticks*—also packaged under the *Crunchy Dahl Sticks* label specifically to appeal to the region’s vast West Indies

expat community—really caught fire in the marketplace to emerge as the company’s bestselling product, reaching production levels that urgently required an infusion of automated packaging equipment into the Maywah plant, operated by Seegobin, his brother Kumar, nephew Avin and their mother Gladys Maywah.

Offered in mild and hot flavors, the tasty and nutritious *Crunchy Pea Sticks* treats are packaged by the foursome—normally in the evening after completing their respective day-job shifts elsewhere—into 70-, 150- and 454-gram bags that ultimately find their way into some 40 East Indian and West Indian food stores in Ontario, and another 40 shops in New York State that cater primarily to their local West Indian, and Guyanese, South Asian communities.

VEGGING OUT

“To manufacture the Crunchy Pea Sticks, we take wholesome, all-natural, Canadian-grown yellow peas that are rich in vegetarian protein and pound it into a powder, add water and spices, and push the dough through an extruder to form it into an elongated stick-shape—before frying it in oil,” Seegobin explains.

“It’s a very labor-intensive process, but at least with our new WeighPack equipment, it removes some of the burden in production—allowing us to grow our business.

“While the company did do well manufacturing everything by hand, the success we achieved was not exactly overwhelming,” says Seegobin, who in 2007 embarked on an ambitious \$1.5-million equipment and facility upgrade to propel the company on to that elusive ‘next level’ of growth.

With a modern new facility—including a fairly large warehouse—in place, Seegobin turned his attention to the production and packaging side of things in April of this year by approaching one of Canada’s bagging equipment specialists and manufacturers, **WeighPack Systems, Inc.**

Renowned in packaging industry circles for manufacturing a diverse range of hard-working, highly reliable horizontal and vertical baggers, as well as conveyors, the Montreal-headquartered machine-builder quickly responded to Seegobin’s needs with a prompt delivery and installation of an *Xpdius Elite 800* bagger and incline infeed conveyor manufactured by WeighPack itself, integrated with a high-performance, 14-head *Primo Weigher* model weighing/scaling system manufactured by **CombiScale Inc.**

“Although we still continue to package our spices by hand,” Seegobin explains, “we purchased the Weigh-Pack Xpdius specifically for the sole purpose to help us garner a larger audience for our Crunchy Pea Sticks.

“Our problem was with packaging,” he expands, saying that prior to automating the packaging line, Maywah was wary of seeking out bigger grocery stores as new customers for fear of not being able to meet production deadlines.

“Because they were packaged by hand, not only did our packaging for the Crunchy Pea Sticks not look as professional as it does now, but we were simply unable to hand-pack quickly enough to meet the demand we would expect from larger would-be customers,” Seegobin recalls. “We weren’t exactly suffering, but there was no growth.”

All that changed virtually overnight since the arrival of WeighPack’s state-of-the-art machinery.

“Because of the throughput speed of the Xpdius machine,” he relates, “we have been able to package the pea-sticks much quicker, which has allowed us to concentrate on growing our customer base.

“To use an example,” Seegobin enthuses, “we recently began supplying Highland Farms, no less, with the Crunchy Pea Sticks we make here.”

The *Xpdius Elite* series of vertical form/fill/seal baggers—which includes the *Elite 800* model purchased by Maywah—is engineered specifically for high-speed, high-performance applications, according to WeighPack, which has steadily leveraged its machine-building



The CombiScale 14-head weigher uses 1.3-liter weighing buckets to distribute precise weights of product into each bag.



Kumar Seegobin, plant manager, checks the controls on the WeighPack Xpdius Elite 800 bagger that Maywah runs at 60 bags per minute.



high-speed workhorse that makes light work of dispensing out precise fill weights from 10 grams to 3.2-kilogram (0.5-ounce to seven pounds) at up to 100 cycles per minute, according to CombiScale.

“I really like it,” Seegobin remarks. “Not only is it easy to operate, clean and maintain, but it is accurate to the gram—meaning there is less product waste for us, which in turn helps us save money.”

And as a bonus, Seegobin says he was very proud to have been able to buy a *bona fide* made-in-Canada solution for his business—citing patriotism as well as the sheer pragmatism of being assured of quick customer-service capabilities whenever necessary.

“Not only has the WeighPack equipment immediately enabled us to package up to 60 small (70-gram) bags of the Crunchy Pea Sticks every minute, which has

helped us earn the business of a major food outlet chain,” he states, “it has also helped us reduce labor costs and enabled us to concentrate on producing and packaging our spices.

“We make a pretty good snack product with our Crunchy Pea Sticks,” Seegobin sums up.

“Thanks to changes in North American eating habits over the years, we’ve made our product healthier by cutting back on salt and oil to where we can now proudly state on our packaging that the product inside contains no trans fats, no cholesterol and no preservatives.

“And thanks to our new WeighPack packaging line,” he concludes, “we’re now really set to take our business to newer, higher levels.”

proWess in recent years to become a highly-respected presence in global packaging machinery markets, today operating international branches in Las Vegas, Chicago, Miami and Shanghai, China.

Equipped with powerful value-added features such as servo-drive pull belts and sealing jaws, floating film and unwind assembly, a color touchscreen HMI (human machine interface), a posi-brake mechanism and an articulating control panel, the *Xpdius Elite* machines are capable

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of forming and sealing up to 120 bags per minute—at widths up to 20 centimeters (eight inches)—using both laminated or polyethylene films.

While Seegobin says that so far there is rarely a need for Maywah to run its machine at faster rates than 60 small bags per minute, “It’s nice to know that our bagger can easily accommodate the growth when the time comes when we are better able to utilize our capacity.

“I also like the fact that it is an easy machine to operate,” Seegobin points out.

EASY DOES IT

“Let’s face it: we are not engineers. We’re a family running a small business, and the easier it is for us to operate the machinery, the easier it is for us to concentrate on growing our business.

“The WeighPack bagger has allowed us to do just that,” Seegobin extols, “plus the packaging really looks so much more professional as well.”

For its part, the high-precision *Primo Weigher* checkweighing system has already made a meaningful contribution in minimizing product waste at the plant, Seegobin reveals, by consistently filling the bags to their exact target weights.

Featuring a mounted HMI positioned for optimal ease of accessibility and maintenance for the user, Maywah’s 14-head *Primo Weigher* model utilizes 1.3-liter weighing buckets to dole out precise measures of pre-set product weight into each bag coming off the *Xpdius* bagger.

Boasting productivity-boosting features such as quick-release pans and buckets, individual lane chutes, an adjustable pivoting hopper, a remote control box, an open frame, and a large 15-inch color touchscreen, the *Primo* weigher is a truly