



WHAT'S NEXT IN PACKAGING INNOVATION?



Packing houses are dealing with rising inflation, labor shortages and shifts in consumer preferences

By Wayne DeCou, sales director, equipment and engineered solutions, Volm Companies

Many of us recall the 1980s as the era of excess, but it wasn't always about big hair or loud music. Back

then, manual labor was the norm as packing facilities relied on large numbers of employees to weigh the

contents of each and every bag.

Not only was that process highly labor-intensive, but it was also imprecise. With many bags packed above and beyond their selling weight, facilities were not only absorbing high labor costs, but also giving away a substantial amount of product.

To help respond to that predicament, Volm Companies introduced automated weighing equipment to the North American marketplace.

As packing facilities that embraced the equipment quickly learned, this type of automation was a game-changer. With reduced waste and

Above: Innovations in packaging include, from left to right, the HiC2 high-clarity, recyclable Code 2 pouch bag; a Bio-CLAF Pillow Pack mesh bag with a large label for branding; and recyclable paper packaging.



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less labor, costs immediately shrank while production soared. And those businesses never looked back.

Fast-forward to 2022 and the industry is facing a new series of challenges. This time, packing houses are dealing with rising inflation, labor shortages and shifts in consumer preferences.

But while these challenges may be different from those in the past, the solution is largely the same. Innovation is again helping the industry overcome modern-day hurdles and thrive in a fast-changing economy.

The automation journey has, at times, been complex, but it has also been rewarding. Grading, weighing, bagging, baling, palletizing, and other options add up to a total equipment solution.

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

Particularly now as many businesses face ongoing labor challenges, technological advancements have provided customers with efficient, reliable, and cost-effective methods of getting their crops from field to fork.

We at Volm believe that these

advancements need to not only continue but accelerate. That is why we are continuing to invest in new research and development to ensure

Above: The Volm Companies headquarters, or head office, is in Antigo, Wisconsin, the heart of the state's certified seed potato growing area.

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packing facilities can become more automated, efficient, and productive.

As part of these efforts, Volm is gearing up to launch a new software solution that will provide metrics for an entire production line.

This latest advancement will provide a bird's-eye view of output as a whole and is one more way for packing facilities to become data driven. This, in turn, will help maximize output and efficiency, allowing customers to get to that next level of automation.

Innovation, however, doesn't stop at equipment. In fact, there are many packaging solutions that are responding to changing consumer habits.

One example of this is the pouch bag. Given the way it attractively showcases product in a store setting, this style of bag has emerged as an increasingly popular option.

If it's gaining in popularity, perhaps it shouldn't be a surprise. In fact, one should never underestimate the impact smart packaging can have.

Case in point, when one customer switched out their usual bag style



Volm Companies was instrumental in introducing automated weighing equipment such as the Volmpack weigher and wicket bagger to the North American marketplace.

for a pillow pack, they noticed an immediate difference. Their new mesh bag with a large label for additional branding created a much more attractive product, and sales subsequently surged.

SHIFTS IN THE MARKETPLACE

But shifts in the marketplace are

about more than just good looks. Increasingly, careful consideration is being given to the sustainability of products. Packaging providers must show strong leadership in this area as we continue to introduce new products.

Volm has a long history of bringing sustainable products to market. Our multiple paper options, for example, are recyclable and capable of running on a wide range of machines, both old and new.

Ultratech mesh is lightweight, delivers a high strength-to-weight ratio, reduces shipping costs, and requires less space for storage.

Compostable netting and lightweight nets use fewer raw materials to produce. And biodegradable bag closures contain 100% U.S. Department of Agriculture-certified, bio-based content while still offering the range of color, shape, and size options that customers have come to expect.

Looking ahead in our packaging innovation journey, we're also excited about the launch of HiC2, a high-



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clarity, recyclable Code 2 pouch bag.

Traditionally, pouch bags were not eligible to be recycled because of the way they were constructed. But given recent technological enhancements, this pouch bag will be recyclable while still maintaining its best assets.

Rigidity, clarity, and a zipper option for sealing will remain strong selling features, not to mention the fact that the pouch bag is made in the United States.

All in all, this is an exciting new development that marries a top trend in packaging with the need to be more eco-friendly, so stay tuned for more details.

RECYCLABLE & COMPOSTABLE

Don't be fooled by false advertising when it comes to being recyclable or compostable. When making a packaging selection, it's important to make sure that the product has the required certification.

Before introducing a new offering into the market, Volm takes the time and care required to make sure it's been tested, trialed, and certified before we make any claims.

Conducting this type of due diligence ensures that the product is living up to the required compostable or recyclability standards and that it's not simply providing lip service to the demands of retailers and consumers.

And since we're talking about retail, we cannot ignore the issue of inflation. From the grocery store to the gas station, rising prices have had a significant impact on the cost of living, as well as the cost of doing business.

Because of these pressures, keeping costs down remains top of mind. To mitigate the impacts as we continue to innovate, we at Volm are making every effort to ensure our own production facilities are run as efficiently as possible so that we can

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– Wayne DeCou,
*sales director, equipment
and engineered solutions,
Volm Companies*

continue to pass on those savings.

While we can't change the overall spike in the cost of goods, we can continuously leverage our strong strategic partnerships and strengthen our efforts to source competitively.

All these efforts ensure we can continue to provide the best value for our customers no matter what

happens in the global economy.

The path to progress sometimes takes unexpected turns, but the important thing is that we continue to push forward. At Volm, we're looking forward to continuing with our industry's rich tradition of promoting innovative change—innovation that will continue this decade and beyond. **BCT**

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