

Fresh Cut Produce Operation

your partner
in food safety



Case Study



EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE, SUPPORT and TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

A Fresh Cut Produce Operation in the Western States

Many produce companies are managed by second, third and even fourth generation owners and this fresh cut operation in the western U.S. is just such a company. Birko has been privileged to work with this innovative organization that offers healthy, ready-to-eat fruits, vegetables and salads for consumers facing the time constraints of the busy world in which we live.

From their fields to your fork, this innovative company supplies prepared produce to the largest restaurant and food service suppliers in the nation. And, their retail unit provides chopped salad kits, organic vegetables, power greens, and vegetable and snack trays to grocery stores from Maine to California. From produce managers to line operators to sanitation team members, their employees are passionate about the quality product that goes into every package.

CHALLENGE

To any fresh cut produce operation, continuous improvement is a fundamental part of the operation and it is critical to have a committed food safety partner, not just another supplier.

Cutting and packaging tomatoes, onions, lettuce and other vegetables is the primary function of this facility and it operates a single shift, five days a week. The facility is meticulously cleaned and sanitized nightly by an in-house sanitation team; however, the challenges posed by more stringent customer audit requirements and the pending implementation of FSMA were driving this facility to seek improvements in service, support and technical assistance.

From strategic initiatives – *input and advice to develop SSOPs that keep ATP counts low* – to specific cleaning challenges – *removing the dull residue from stainless steel equipment* – this produce facility wanted a food safety support team that would be readily available, both in the plant and via phone, to answer technical questions and provide professional guidance. In short, they were looking for a partner to help take their food safety practices to the next level.

birkocorp.com

9152 Yosemite Street, Henderson, CO 80640
800.525.0476

SOLUTION

After listening to the company's pain points and understanding what they wanted, Birko provided a no cost, no obligation assessment of the facility.

This assessment, referred to as the SWAT process, is a comprehensive sanitation and food safety evaluation of a facility provided from an outside perspective. It included an in-depth report on the facility's current sanitation practices, including: employee safety, chemical storage and usage, an assessment of the sanitary design and condition of processing equipment, and an assessment of facility design.

In addition to spending time with the Operations, QA, and sanitation teams, Birko staff, led by Elis Owens, Ph.D., completed a detailed on-site observation and review of chemical suitability and efficacy, titrated the concentration of current cleaning chemicals, analyzed water quality, and evaluated water pressure and temperature. All in an effort to determine opportunities for improving food safety, increasing efficiencies, and reducing deficiencies.

This Birko customer demanded an experienced, high performing partner. When the SWAT findings were synthesized and presented to the facility's management team, along with customized recommendations that would deliver the results they desired, they were impressed. The quality and detail of the observations presented, as well as the level of technical expertise displayed, were convincing and confirmed Birko as a desired partner.

From the strategic to the operational, Birko offered **service, support, and technical assistance**, including:

- The opportunity to build a strong partnership based on technical expertise and support
- Optimized chemistries in response to specific needs
- Detailed monthly reporting on service provided and inventory usage
- Recommended techniques and cleaning strategies for difficult to clean and limited access areas
- Expertise and guidance to develop SSOPs
- On-site, day or night, sanitation support
- Ongoing, on-site, food safety training
- Developing an enhanced CIP process for flume systems

RESULTS

"Birko delivered on what we didn't know we needed. Having access to the science staff and the whole Birko food safety team is very comforting and I sleep better at night."

Produce Manager

"Having a Birko representative in the plant at night with the sanitation team, evaluating, training, and ensuring that we are using all the products safely and correctly, goes a long way with my team."

Sanitation Team Lead

"We've never given a score this high [on a customer audit]."

Food Safety Auditor, completing an audit of the facility on behalf of a facility customer

FOCUS on PRODUCTS

Over 400 specialty products to meet specific food safety needs, including these products used at this facility:

Hang Time: a self-foaming chlorinated alkaline cleaner optimized for use in cold water. It was developed in response to a need expressed by this facility. When applied to equipment, Hang Time clings effectively to vertical surfaces, allowing the sanitation crew time to thoroughly hand scrub equipment. Free of Nonyl Phenol Ethoxylates (NPEs), a potentially reportable ingredient suspected to have negative impact on aquatic life.

Ultra Niter: one of several proprietary acid cleaners that was extremely effective at removing the dull film on stainless steel, restoring it to a "like new" condition. Free of NPEs, as are all Birko products.

Liquik 20: a mild alkaline solvent-based general purpose cleaner for hand scrubbing totes, lugs, bins, and soft metals. Cleans effectively without containing 2-butoxy ethanol (a suspected carcinogen commonly used in other manufacturers' cleaning products). Free of NPEs, as are all Birko products.