

SAS Case Study: Natural Life

Overview

Country Pure Foods is a premier manufacturer of fruit and vegetable juices and frozen products for foodservice, retail and private label markets.

SAS designed a solution that not only restored the structural stability of the building, but provided additional pallet positions as well. SAS utilized every pallet flow option available to create a robust system to provide Country Pure Foods years of smooth operation while maintaining standards required for certification of the SQF Food Safety & Quality Code by the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI).

This solution was implemented in a working environment with minimal disruption to day to day operations.

The Problem

Natural Life was growing fast. So fast that they were quickly outgrowing the third-party logistics provider that handled their warehousing and distribution. “Our provider’s performance was less than acceptable,” admits COO Mark Bondurant. “Their number of lines per day was too low for the volume we were doing.”

This became an even bigger issue when things got busy. “When we reached our peak seasons, they would get behind,” says Mark. With the November/December holiday season coming up fast, it was clear to Mark that Natural Life needed the capacity to get out more lines. If they didn’t find a way to ship more products faster, they would have disappointed the bulk of their customer base and tarnished their reputation.

That was when Mark found a warehouse in which they could house their products and process shipments. All he need to complete the project was a conveyor system. That’s when he reached out to SAS.

The Solution

SAS is a premier provider of materials handling consulting and systems integration. Delivering solutions across a wide range of industries, SAS works closely with clients to identify ways to improve operational processes. And, because SAS understands that businesses grow, SAS makes sure that each client’s materials handling capability is able to grow with them.

For Natural Life’s project, SAS provided a turnkey solution based on 25 years of experience. SAS consulted with Mark, designed the conveyor layout, sourced the hardware, installed the conveyors, commissioned the system, handled the

troubleshooting, and brought in the necessary controls people to make sure that the conveyor system properly communicated with their warehouse management system which included barcode scanning, weighing, and dimensioning.

Challenges

Rapid business growth outpaced the performance of Natural Life's third-party logistics provider, and with peak season rapidly approaching, they needed a system that could keep up with demand. South Atlantic Systems Group designed, sourced, installed, and integrated a complex warehouse conveyor system in time for Natural Life's peak season, resulting in doubled lines per day and extended packing lines to accommodate growth so that the November/December peak exceeded season forecasts.

The Results

When Mark selected SAS, they got the partner they were looking for. "We encountered some serious challenges getting the dimensioner and in-line laser beam scanner working," says Mark. "However, SAS worked closely with my technical engineer to find the root of the problem. They didn't give up, and I really appreciated that. When you run into problems, you're going to need people you can trust and that are willing to stick it out and put in whatever it takes to get the job done. That's what I needed, and that's what SAS provided."

With the system expertly installed, Natural Life quickly ramped up operations and enjoyed their best peak season ever.

Doubled Lines Per Day

Natural Life's third-party logistics provider was completing an average of roughly 3,500 lines per day. On a good day, they might get up to 5,000. "Now, with our new conveyor system in our own warehouse, we can easily get out 7,000 lines per day," shares Mike. "And, depending on things like timing and the mix of orders, we can get out more than 9,000 lines."

Exceeded November/December Peak Season Forecasts

Natural Life went live with their new conveyor system in early October. So, everyone had to get up to speed quickly to be prepared for the November/December peak season. Training happened in a condensed timeframe, but everyone adapted to the new system and quickly became very proficient.

"I'll admit that there were some concerns," reveals Mike. "However, we made it through our busiest season yet, and successfully shipped out more lines than we would have had we not made the move into our own warehouse and had SAS install the conveyers. In fact, we exceed our forecasts."

The Conveyor System Grew with the Business

Natural Life's business was growing so fast that they quickly needed to make additions to their conveyor system. It turned out that they were picking faster than they were packing, so they needed a way to balance those rates.

"Our business was booming so much that we realized we needed more pack stations," shares Mike. "So, we're extending the pack station area. And, we're extending the shipping line to accommodate more packages."

When asked whether he was happy with SAS's work, Mark responded: "We are very pleased with the conveyor system. The entire project from quoting to completion was professional, timely and cost effective. The team at SAS was very easy to work with, and they made recommendations for improvement at each stage," says Mark. "Our project required a complex systems integration and communication process and SAS provided technical support to successfully configure the system. The SAS team ensured every aspect of the project met or exceeded expectations."

"The expertise that SAS brought to the table was important. And, the fact that they were willing to work with the design that I had and help me reach my goal meant a lot."

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