

Moving meat tools

IBEX Industries is in the business of supplying machinery and consumables for the meat-processing industry. Catherine Pickavet talked to the company's general manager about its role in the age of innovation.

The meat-processing industry in New Zealand isn't much different from any other industry in any other country: In a time when business owners are skittish about projected budgets and market behaviour, it behooves them to more closely monitor their systems and the supplies they move in order to get the most out of their operation.

IBEX Industries, a New Zealand-based supplier of machinery and consumables for the meat-processing industry at home and abroad, knows all too well the importance of understanding the market it's in and steering a course that helps it keep up with trends.

Ray Connor, general manager of IBEX, considers automation one of these trends.

"What we see happening is that there are moves and trends towards automation to either do one of two things," he told *Food Magazine*. "Remove labour from a

process so the process doesn't rely on labour or, where labour is still required, have a machine or a process that will enhance the productivity of that individual."

What is happening, Connor continued, is that you've got a weakening of the skill base as a result of people trying to cover all things or not being able to specialise within their industry.

"So you've got a lot of trends within labour of people moving within trades, within jobs, within industries, and when they leave, they take valuable experience with them."

To try and maintain successful relationships with its customers, IBEX Industries concentrates on the perfect combination of machine and human in order to supply the industry with the best tools for the job.

"More and more you're either looking to optimise your labour -- making them

more efficient by giving them machinery tools or processes that create a greater return per man hour," Connor said. "Through machinery, through innovation, you make your labour more efficient."

Inside the operation

IBEX Industries is a two-part business. For more than 25 years, it has distributed band saws, skinning machines, tying machines and other similar types of tools and machinery to meat processors in New Zealand, Australasia, Europe and the Americas.

The other part of the business, its core, said Connor, is the trimming system it manufactures, powered both electrically and pneumatically.

"It's effectively a circular knife. So you've got a round blade on the end of a powered hand piece, and this blade travels up to 9 metres a second on our high-speed trimmer," Connor said.

"That blade, when it's rotating, is used to trim meat off bones or to trim fat off animal carcasses."


Industry challenge

It is this trimming tool that Connor said differentiates them in the industry; but it also poses the biggest challenge.

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"Obviously the challenges for us as with any other company are to continue to develop the solutions that meet the needs of the market -- both current and future requirements," Connor said. "You've got to be one step ahead of what your customer needs, so when they have that requirement, you're there already for them. We looked at what's good and what's bad in similar products, and we've tried to design out the weaknesses that are accepted by customers and

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The IBEX Electric Trimmer helps improve operator welfare by removing potentially dangerous flex shaft cable vibration and eliminating high-voltage motors from the processing floor.

improve and enhance the features," he continued. "We have universal spares across all categories so that one part can be used on multiple tools. We have modular heads on trimmers so customers don't have to buy multiple tools for multiple applications.

"But perhaps our most important innovation is that we have made these tools safer for operators by removing harmful cable vibration, which is often associated with these tools."

Connor said the result of this business model is that the company has reduced the cost of ownership by reducing the cost of spares inventory. In addition, he said, IBEX has reduced the maintenance time required on its tools.

"In terms of innovative, that sums that up."

For the customer

Perhaps the most important aspect of IBEX's operations is its relationship with its customers. Without them, of course, there would be no business. As with all successful relationships, ensuring a mutually beneficial one requires constant attention to the details of not only the customer but also the customer's position in the market.

"Customers have similar challenges to face and similar constraints on their businesses and similar issues to focus on," Connor said. "What we try to do through our product range is offer solutions that deliver lower total operating costs with improved performance, so the user experience is enhanced. We're really trying to partner with our customers to find solutions for them where they're needed."

www.ibexind.net

The electric and pneumatic trimming system

Among the range of products that IBEX supplies includes everything from band saws, skinners and slicers, trimmers and string-tying machines to mesh gloves and aprons. In addition to its supply chain, though, are the IBEX electric and pneumatic trimmers.

The IBEX Electric DC Trimming System comes in two versions: The high-torque FP Electric is designed for the removal of fat and the slicing and recovery of meat. The high-speed FF Electric is designed for bone trimming. The system includes a low-voltage DC motor that is mounted in the hand piece, which IBEX claims is an industry first. The ultra small motor's low voltage comes via a local control box with an integrated e-stop and control panel for added safety. A transformer box remotely converts the mains power to low-voltage DC and has the ability to operate up to three hand pieces simultaneously.

IBEX said that most of the spare parts are interchangeable between the FP Electric and FF Electric.

The Pneumatic Drive System is also available in two options. The FP Pneumatic operates at 4,000 RPMs at 90 PSI or 6 Bar and consumes 16 CFM or 453 LPM of air. Its motor and planetary gear head help ensure fast blade speeds and reduce blade stall.

The FF Pneumatic is designed for bone trimming and spinal cord removal. It uses a direct drive system to create an output speed of 15,000 RPM.

IBEX said both versions allow the handle and trigger to be rotated relative to the modular trimmer head. They also come with an offset exhaust as standard, though the company said coaxial exhaust can be fitted as an optional extra.

IBEX Trimmer Heads fit both versions of the electric and pneumatic trimming tools.



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