

From left: Manufactured by WeighPack Systems, the Vertek 750, Vertek 1600 and a Vertek 1150 bagging machines strike an impressive sight at CLIC International's 110,000-square-foot facility in Laval, Que.

THE BAGGING RIGHTS

Quebec food processor adds a special touch to its bagged bulk product with easy-carry convenience

In the food industry, it takes many kinds of ideas, products and machinery to make the world go round—and Laval, Que.-based food processor and distributor **CLIC International Inc.** certainly provides a compelling case for variety being the spice of life.

Founded by president Assaad Abdelnour in 1979 and evolving into a dedicated import-export business in 1984, CLIC—an acronym for the **Canadian Lebanese Investment Corporation**—built up its client base over the years by being something of an equal-opportunity supplier to Montreal's increasingly multiethnic population mix.

Sourcing its products from across the Middle East, Asia and Europe helped CLIC to grow into a thriving food-service industry supplier of foodstuffs and staples that not only catered to the traditional dietary needs of immigrant communities, but also for the province's French-Canadian population that has always displayed a special fondness for trying out new culinary innovations from exotic locales.

Originally operating out of a small warehouse located on-site at local a **Metro Richelieu** supermarket, CLIC has managed to grow in the proverbial leaps and bounds that would make any food industry upstart rightfully proud.

Today employing 185 people at six locations across Canada, the company's processing and distribution operations have combined for total revenues of \$32 million in 2006, with about a quarter of that total accounted for by exports to customers in over 30 countries worldwide.

Stocking more than 1,400 SKUs (stock-keeping units) at all times, the company boasts being a direct supplier of more than 65 different varieties of dried legumes and cereals and about 45 varieties of rice, including Basmati, wild, perfumed and braised rice.

In addition to being able to cut out the middlemen by purchasing some of these staples directly from wholesalers, CLIC also teamed up with **Agriculture Canada** and local farmers and growers to initiate the development of lentils, chickpeas and fava or broad beans right at home in Canada—raising them, in fact, to high-enough quality to attract new export markets in the U.S., Caribbean, parts of Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

The company's diverse mix of customers—convenience and ethnic-food stores, natural-food shops, hotels, hospital and restaurant suppliers, foodstuff converters, independent distributors, cruise-ship operators, supermarket chains,

etc.—is fittingly matched by the broad array of recipes in which its products end up, representing the best of Arabic, Asian, Indian, African, Latin-American, Caribbean and eastern European culinary traditions.

The company's main processing and distribution center—located under the roof of a 110,000-square-foot facility in Laval—is equipped with four vertical form/fill/seal (F/F/S) automatic bagging machines and two manual F/F/S machines manufactured by the Montreal-based machine-builder **WeighPack Systems Inc.**, with the latest of these machines installed last year to handle the filling and packaging of 10-kilogram bags.

“It was the growth of our markets that has led us to purchase our fourth WeighPack vertical bagging machine in 2007,” explains Victor Bou-Malhan, packaging manager the Laval plant.



CLIC International is the first company to utilize its Vertek 1600 bagger to create plastic handles inline during the filling of 10-kilogram bags.

“This one that is somewhat different from the others we own,” says Bou-Malhan, adding that the plant's other packaging machines are utilized mostly for packaging product in one-pound and two-pound, or two-kilogram and five-kilogram bags.

“Sitting right in the middle of our facility, this machine is so tall and imposing that anyone walking into the department can't help but look over at it with awe,” he says.

As befits the machine's gargantuan proportions, the **Vertek 1600** vertical F/F/S bagger offers the capacity to fill bags with approximately 500,000 pounds of product per week, according to Bou-Malhan.

Outfitted with a 240-kg-capacity hopper, the **Vertek 1600** bagger features an incline feeding conveyor that runs

the product to two augers located at the very top of the forming, filling and sealing area, where—depending on the bag weight requirements—the weighing mechanism activates the opening gate to release the product upon reaching the desired weight.

The machine is also equipped with three printers, with each of which performing a different printing function so as to not slow down the production line.

While most run-of-the-mill 10-kilo bulk bags are not known for user-friendliness, the WeighPack machine has enabled CLIC to enhance its bags with a special value-added feature that has provided the company with another important, if subtle, competitive advantage, according to Bou-Malhan.

“Our 10-kilo bags have a handle that is formed during the sealing operation,” Bou-Malhan explains.

“It's at this stage that a mechanism is integrated into the bagging machine—making two one-inch-diameter holes within the top sealing band for the users to grasp the bag with their fingers,” says Bou-Malhan, while complimenting the performance of other WeighPack machinery installed at the Laval plant earlier, including two **Vertek 1150** and a **Vertek 750** models—integrated with a pair of servo-driven **Star 200** augers.

Between them, the WeighPack baggers cover all the most commonly-used bag sizes—from a maximum of 7.5-inch-wide bag on the **Vertek 750** model up to 16-inches-wide on the **Vertek 1600**, and as wide as 22 inches on a **Vertek 2200**—with all the benefits of user-friendly operation and low-maintenance requirements.

Bou-Malhan expects the finger-friendly 10-kg bags to become very popular within the foodservice industry, particularly in the fast-growing private-label market segment.

“We are already selling large quantities of this bag to various sectors of the food industry, especially in the HRI (hotels, restaurants and institutions) sector,” Bou-Malhan reflects.

“And our new 10-kilogram bag has been very well-received by both merchants and other important customers who have really learned to appreciate the usefulness of the handle featured on these bags.” ♦

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WeighPack Systems Inc.

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