

Unico's switch to CHEP ensures pallet quality and availability

CHEP allows Unico to focus on core competencies

September 9, 2014
by Kara Kurylłowicz



Where are my pallets? When should I expect the next shipment? How many of those pallets need to be repaired? Will I get my pallets back? How many pallets have I lost? Will I have enough pallets for tomorrow's production run? Will the pallets I get back be of comparable quality? Will my customers accept these pallets?

"That's the beauty of working with CHEP – they're the ones that deal with all of those issues and questions," says Fabian Venier, vice-president logistics, Unico, a Canadian food manufacturer, processor and distributor that has specialized in Mediterranean-style products and ingredients since 1917. "As a whole the retail grocery industry was making the shift to CHEP and after Unico made that same move, we saw that CHEP really was an improvement over our previous system."

Today, Unico's commitment to the "culture of Mediterranean eating" is as strong as ever with a focus on canned, jarred and dry products such as pasta, beans, rice, oils, tomatoes and sauces, vinegar, fish, olives and marinades. In addition, Unico which is owned by Sunbrite Foods, is a leading manufacturer of tomato products and the market leader in several major categories, which are packed in Canada.

"The owners have always believed in making what we sell because it gives us control over our product quality, which means that more than 70 per cent of Unico's products

are manufactured in Canada at one of our five manufacturing and distribution centres,” says Venier.

Unico is a dominant presence in the retail sector selling to traditional grocery retailers as well as the big-box stores, but it also works extensively with the foodservice and institutional sectors. As a result, Unico manufactures, processes, packages and palletizes everything in Ontario for shipment coast-to-coast.

What’s the biggest challenge for major national manufacturers like Unico? While the distances those pallets are shipped will add to the wear and tear, the number of times each pallet is handled regardless of the distance traveled is more of an issue. On average, each pallet of Unico products will be handled an average of 10 times by operators in the manufacturing plant, the loading docks and distribution centres for each one-way trip.

“Each fork truck operator can handle 200 to 400 pallets daily so a certain percentage of damage is unavoidable no matter how diligent and careful they might be,” says Venier. “The fork truck itself weighs about 15,000 lbs., so if the driver is off even half an inch, the pallet is likely to sustain damage – the question is how much damage, can it be repaired, if so how soon and if not, when will it be replaced.”

The move to CHEP ensures Unico has top-quality pallets, made from renewable resources, at the right place at the right time, since the onus is on CHEP to sort and assess pallets then switch out the damaged for usable pallets.

“Thanks to CHEP, we always have the necessary pallets on hand, they’re in great shape and ready to go, which helps our deliveries get out the door to our customers on schedule,” says Venier, who also appreciates the fact Unico no longer devotes valuable real estate to the storage of empty and damaged pallets as happened with the previous supplier. “Every time, we get a load of CHEP pallets, we know the quality is sure to be top-notch because CHEP has set that precedent!”

In 57 countries, CHEP partners with more than 300,000 customers across a wide range of sectors and industries with a focus on consumer goods, fresh produce, general manufacturing, automotive, aerospace and chemicals. The global leader in pallet, crate and container pooling services, CHEP is now in its 36th year in Canada. From its performance-proven stringer and block pallets to its display-ready half pallet, CHEP is the only Canadian pallet provider to offer all three options.

“CHEP offers multiple platform choices but as importantly, we manage everything around the manufacturing, sorting, inspecting and repairing of our pallets so that our customers can focus on their core competency which is producing their respective goods,” says Frank Bozzo, director of sales, CHEP.

Because CHEP Canada operates coast-to-coast and has a broad network of strategically positioned service centres, the company seamlessly meets customers' requirements.

“Over the course of 36 years, we have developed the infrastructure and relationships that ensure our pallets are accepted by all retailers and distributors across Canada,” says Bozzo. “We really are here to help our customers build better supply chains.”

For more than three decades now, CHEP Canada has focused on giving retail and distribution customers the logistics support that allows them to focus exclusively on their own core competencies. Going forward, CHEP Canada will continue to manufacture, sort, inspect and repair its pallets to ensure customers have quality pallets on-hand when required.

“CHEP handles all of the administration, management and handling and ensures we get good sound pallets every time all the time,” says Venier.