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Meat Packaging: Moving from quality control to quality assurance

In today's meat industry, quality is king. A company's success will be dictated by the quality of its product. And as processing and packaging technologies become increasingly sophisticated, it is vital to ensure that these processes are functioning correctly on the production line – or the quality of the product will suffer.

Modified atmosphere packaging, MAP, is a key method to maintain the quality and improve the shelf-life of processed and fresh meat products. Ensuring that the correct gas mixture is in the packaging is a crucial requirement of the process, so the mixture must be monitored in a reliable and efficient way.

Traditional quality control approaches involve manually removing packages at intervals and testing them to ensure that the gas mixture is as it should be. This is time-consuming and wasteful. A far better system involves quality assurance, where the gas mixture is monitored constantly during the flushing and packaging process, so any deviation is immediately identified and can be corrected with minimum disruption to the production line.

Karsten Kejlhof, of the MAP quality solutions provider PBI-Dansensor, explains. "Conventional quality control involved removing a package every so often to check it. If you take out a sample every 15 minutes, you don't know if the problem might occur just after you have removed the sample, by which time hundreds of packages might have gone through the system before the next sample is checked. Also, three samples every fifteen minutes is 12 an hour, two shifts a day for 300 days, creating a lot of waste and repackaging just for testing the samples."

Far more cost-effective is to adopt a quality assurance approach by installing in-line gas analysers that continuously monitor the gas content of the packaging chamber before the packages are sealed. This saves time and money, says Kejlhof, and typically the cost of the investment in the technology can be recovered within a year.

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