Fresh in North America

German company expands markets for its shelf-life extenders, sanitizers

By Kathy Gibbons
Contributing Writer

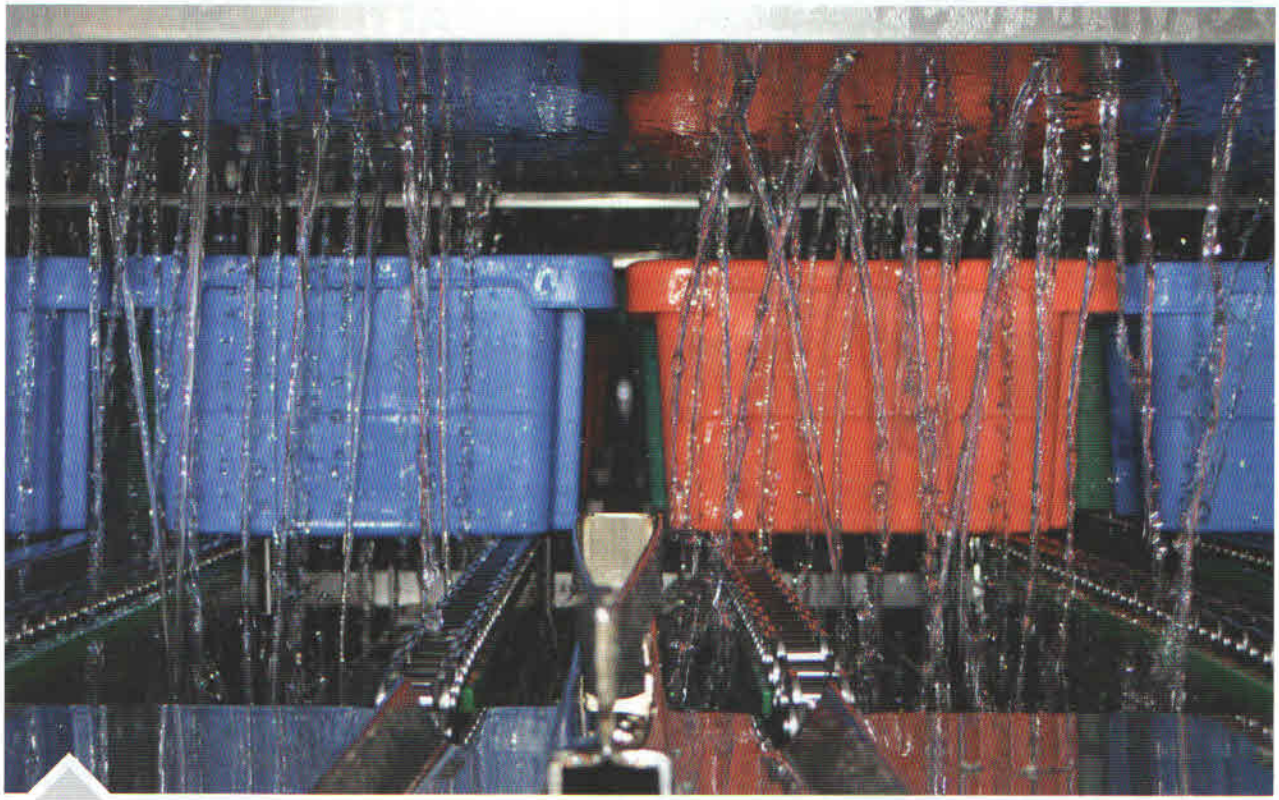
FOOD Freshly is hoping to take North America by storm.

Established in 1994 in Germany by Sukhdey Singh, the company has opened offices in Canada and connected with a distributor in Mexico to tackle the North American market.

Twenty years ago, Singh developed a product to extend shelf life for the fresh-cut potatoes so popular there at the time. It was an alternative to the sulphites in common use and resulted in the formation of the company, said Benjamin Singh, Sukhdey's son and president of the recently formed FOOD Freshly North America.

As in the United States, the fresh-cut market was growing, Singh said. With increasing demand for other fresh-cut items like salads, apples and fruit mixes, FOOD Freshly expanded its product mix to serve those commodities.

"We took that knowledge that originated with potatoes and transferred it to other fruits and vegetables," Benjamin Singh said. "We developed new products



Wash water with FOOD Freshly sanitizer is applied to bins of produce to extend shelf life. *Photo: FOOD Freshly North America.*

FOOD freshly
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with a lot of research — what worked best with different varieties ... and nothing genetically modified, no sulphites, nothing that could be unhealthy."

A new player

Firmly established in Europe now, the company has expanded to North America with a goal of becoming "one of the major providers of shelf life in North America," Singh said. Its FOOD Freshly North America subsidiary is located in suburban Toronto, Ontario. From there, it will work to expand its client base across the United States and in Mexico, where it has partnered with AERSA for distribution.

FOOD Freshly has set its sights on Mexico because it sees huge opportunity there.

"Fresh-cut is not that big, but what we found when we went to Mexico, we were finding a lot of customers are using chlorine and ascorbic acid for extended shelf life," said Margaret Tomaszewska, North American account executive, adding that many of the Mexican producers' customers are in the United States and other countries, and international demand for Mexican production is rising.

Acknowledging that FOOD Freshly is a "new player in the game" in North America, Singh and Tomaszewska are optimistic that FOOD Freshly's product mix will get the attention of North American processors catering to the retail and foodservice industries.

"Generally, we have a core portfolio of about five or six products," Singh said, explaining that how each is used is tailored to the specific circumstances of every facility and commodity. "We offer customized products. We take samples of the water and analyze and see how to adjust the formulation to get the best results."

FOOD Freshly's products include O Plus for sliced apples and other fruits, Bio 5 for salads and vegetables, KK Plus for organic and other potatoes and SE Plus for asparagus and strawberries. It also has a line of five sanitizers, including a fog disinfectant to address bacteria in cold rooms.

Ingredients are FDA-approved, and the company is awaiting organic certification for an O-Plus Ultra product.

"All of our sanitizers are based on hydrogen peroxide but different concentrations," Singh said. "Chlorine is commonly used in the U.S. as a sanitizer, and that's what we could replace with our hydrogen peroxide solutions.

"When it's done, it's completely neutral. It doesn't leave any smell or odor."

Customers who opt for FOOD Freshly's 3P process buy into a three-step regimen that includes testing wash water, presanitizing based on the test results and then treatment with appropriate "freshness retainer."

Lengthening shelf life

FOOD Freshly claims it can enhance shelf life substantially for some commodities.

Brett Chase, director of operations for Indianapolis Fruit Company's Garden Cut Division, said his company went with FOOD Freshly's O Plus for that reason — and because it cost less.

"We did our due diligence on shelf life studies for probably two-and-a-half months," Chase said. "Across the board we saw identical, if not better, results. We're going to use it on pretty much all of our products."

For example, he said, Granny Smith apples held up for 28 days under testing "with almost no change in taste, texture or appearance." Prior to the switch, shelf life was around 15 days.

The company isn't lengthening expiration dates on its products. But the objective is that products still look new when normal pull dates roll around.

"Obviously, from a food safety standpoint, we wouldn't hold it that long, and we're not changing (the dates on) our labels," Chase said.

Tomaszewska said preserving flavor is another feature that the company promotes.

"They don't alter taste," she said. "Apples don't taste like a lemon, (which happens when) a lot of companies use ascorbic acid.

"A lot of times, you open the package, and you can smell the chlorine."

All of the products to be sold in North America are manufactured in Germany and sent to Canada. From there, they can be shipped throughout that country and the United States. Mexican orders will be shipped directly there.