**The Essentiality Of Technology Advancement For Safety In The Food Processing & Packaging Industry: Action Amidst Global Pandemic**

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In the age of mass product consumption and quick services it’s almost impossible to meet the demands of the consumer without enlisting the help of technology. It is easy to overlook the absolute prevalence of technology in the food processing and packaging industry as we first only think about the technology involved in moving the products along a line within the factory; however, that’s only a small part of a much bigger picture. The reality is much more complex given that someone has to design the machinery, deliver the parts of the product, assemble the product, and make sure to detect any potential hazards; these all could probably be done without much technological interference, but the results would never meet the demands of our modern society. Instead many companies refusing to invest in the necessary equipment or without the funds to spare would be lost in the competitive market due to their inefficiency. In fact, the impact of high tech reaches well beyond just preparation or prompt delivery for customer satisfaction; it manifests as a necessity not only for consumers, but also employee safety and well-being. This year’s encounter with the coronavirus pandemic and the response from the industry has brought more than enough evidence to back the claim.

The first half of the year brought many new changes to the food processing & packaging industry specifically for the safety protocol and technology was brought to facilitate the transition. Safety is a top priority for many industries, but it’s especially recognized by this industry given that they need to produce a product that fits the requirements set by the FDA and the best results for production require a healthy and present workforce since the division of labor requires particular specialization. Everyday the workers take on the tasks of cleaning the raw products as they travel across the plant through the electrically powered lines and making sure no package leaves the plant with spoiled poultry or with anything other than what is expected by the label read by consumers. Thanks to the freezers and label making technology, it is much easier to carry out that responsibility and even newer technology has been developed over the years to help facilitate the process which could be stressful to the laborers. For example, many meat processing plants have implemented new x-ray metal detecting machines to prevent hazards and contamination from employee equipment in the high speed production lines. Tyson Foods in particular has “invested $500 million in technology and automation in the past three years” and is striving to have more “robots in factories to debone and filet meat”. If this technology is refined it could lead also to a higher quality product. This way the public is ensured a safe and consumable product. A safer work environment for the employees is also encouraged through the identification badge system which works for entering the building and clocking in and out for break time to make sure everyone is where they need to be and no one on the outside interferes with production. All of this is possible with new technological programs and systems. Another aspect of the industry impacted by these is the emergency response system of alarms and machines such as those in a control room to deal with moving workers away from toxic chemicals or fires. It’s easy to underestimate this role of safety tech in the industry when there’s so much heavy duty machinery transporting packages throughout the plant, but it saves lives in such an essential but risky industry especially during a pandemic.

 When the pandemic hit many businesses had to be shut down and many people were left unemployed because they simply didn’t have the necessary equipment and training to ensure the safety of the millions of people in their buildings, but there were others -essential workers- who risked their lives to supply the nation’s necessities. State governors “outlined industries deemed ‘essential’... which typically include health care, food service, and public transportation.” This order left the food processing and packaging industry with no choice other than to adjust to the moment and prepare to keep their workers safe and also the consumers buying their products. This was a responsibility which proved to be very difficult given that at one point “15,800 reported positive cases of COVID-19” had been linked to “193 [meatpacking] plants in 32 states.” This created a chain reaction that started with the closure of several plants which then led to a negative impact on the meat farmers and the country’s meat supply. Such a widespread problem was and continues to be faced by the industry and many are looking at what seems to be the best way to cope and deal with the situation: technology. With so many employees required to operate smoothly in the industry and the tight areas of work, it was important to make sure to take precautions in monitoring their symptoms. By limiting the number of people with symptoms in the plants, the chances of spread can drastically decrease due to the pathway of the virus. With this in mind companies like Tyson Foods invested in not only digital thermometers but even walk through temperature scanners which could detect the possibility of a fever. These scanners are said to be “faster and more accurate than handheld devices” and better for mass screenings which is needed for an industry which employs more than 11,000,000 essential workers. This equipment best summarizes the role and importance of technology in the food processing and packaging industry as one of efficiency and safety. This role of technology ties back to the goal and responsibility that the industry has in making sure the food people are eating is enjoyable and safe and employees have the necessary support to carry out such a crucial task even in such unsure times.

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