

Preserving the full flavour of dried fruit

A major producer of dried fruit in France has chosen three different types of Ishida multihead weigher to handle a wide variety of products. To optimise product taste, great importance was placed on fast and effective cleaning of the weighers.

Maître Prunille markets the famous Agen prunes as well as fruit from all over the world. The company is a European leader in dried fruit, and the world's third largest supplier of prunes. Half of its 50,000-tonne annual production takes place at its Casseneuil site, located in the 'Prune Heartland' of southwest France.

A new way to experience the goodness of fruit

Maître Prunille has pioneered the marketing of "soft dried fruit". This category of fruit has been carefully dried, making it easy to transport and store, and then rehydrated under controlled conditions, yielding a product which closely resembles the original fruit in taste and texture. This is helping to bring about an increase in healthy eating, as it has introduced many new consumers in addition to those who enjoy the unrehydrated product.

The Casseneuil plant packs both soft-dried and dried products. Among the former are plums, apricots, raisins, figs and dates, all destined for single-fruit packs and together making up 80% of the production. Dried fruits, which can

include pears, mangoes, pineapples or cranberries, are mixed to give specific products such as Orchard Mix. All are packed into 'stand-up' bags.

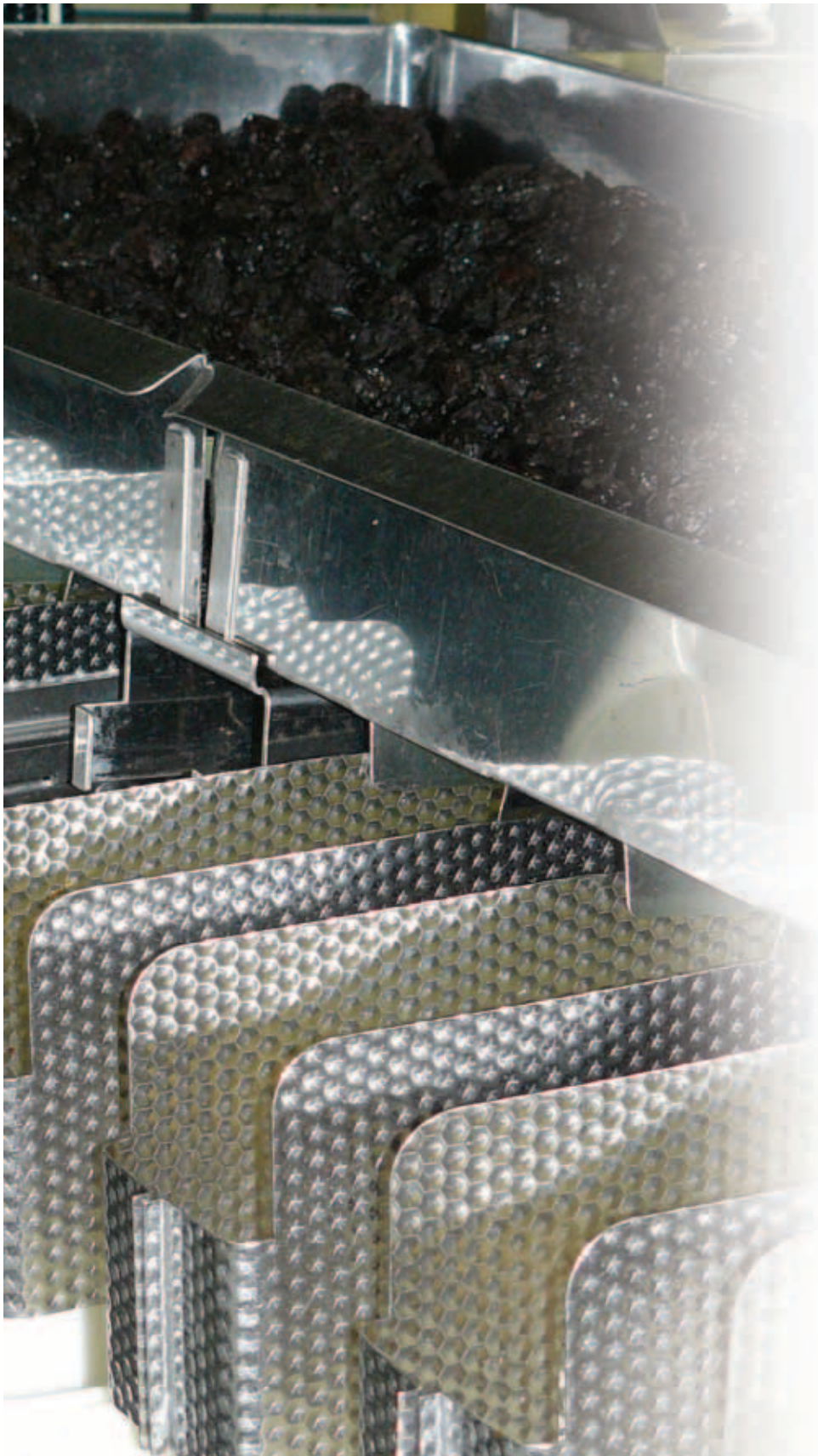
To cope with Casseneuil's current and potential product ranges, three different types of Ishida multihead weigher have now been installed.

The FFW, for when the going gets sticky

To handle sticky fruit, particularly those that are difficult to feed smoothly, the company installed two Ishida Fresh Food weighers (FFWs) in 2005. In these machines, the heads are arranged in a straight line, instead of the circular configuration seen in conventional multihead weighers.

Operators can add the product from boxes or crates. Any obvious clumps can be broken up manually in the easily reachable infeed, or while the product is flowing, via a system of belts, to the hoppers.

The two 12-head FFWs are working in tandem, with a single outlet to a bagmaker.



An all-rounder for fast, accurate packing

In 2008, for routine use with products which are moderately sticky, a fast Ishida RS-Series weigher with 14 heads was chosen. RS is Ishida's mid-range offering and, thanks to the latest combination calculation hardware and software, runs at speeds that most top-range competitive weighers are unable to exceed. Because the RS makes more within-limits combinations available during any given weigh cycle, the RS-Series is also very accurate and will seldom, if ever, need to select a weight outside the specified range. The model at Casseneuil is fitted with a ring gate at its exit, to ensure that product release into the bagmaker occurs in short, concentrated doses.

The Screwfeeder: full automation and the highest accuracy

For products which can readily be delivered to the weigher by elevator, Maître Prunille picked, also in 2008, one of the new Ishida Screwfeeder multiheads. This 14-head model, from Ishida's top-of-the-range R-Series, uses continually rotating coreless screws to convey the product into the weigh hoppers. Despite the power of this mechanism to move even the most resistant products, it is also quite gentle, an important factor when the appearance and integrity of the fruit have to be maintained.

This weigher offers the benefits of superior accuracy, particularly important with high-value products, and impressive speeds.

Meeting tight specifications

To compete for and win the latest contract, Ishida France's proposal had to meet demanding speed and accuracy specifications. In addition, Casseneuil handles over 2,900 products, each with its own taste or mixture of tastes. Very frequent product changeovers were inevitable, and the hygiene and cleanability elements of the specifications were particularly stringent.

"I was looking for a solution that corresponded in a realistic fashion with our specification" says Philippe Moutier, Process Director for all the Maître Prunille sites. He describes the Ishida equipment, with its 'lift-off, drop-on' contact parts and waterproof body construction as "...unbelievably easy to clean", and continues:

"This is the right choice because Ishida also bring to the table insights which will help us with future development in many areas, including planning and hygiene."

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