

PRESS ARTICLE

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Inex Belgium chooses Sidel's aseptic solutions to package UHT milk in PET bottles



Belgian milk producer Inex has selected Sidel's aseptic PET packaging line to help meet a growing demand for locally produced milk, prompted by the COVID-19 restrictions in March. Thanks to Sidel's new and sustainable packaging line, Inex plans to boost production capacity by supplying ultra-high-temperature (UHT) milk products in PET bottles.

Passionate about sustainability and the delivery of high quality milk, Inex is a 100% privately owned company in the heart of Belgium. It exports 50% of its production to neighbouring countries and produces a variety of authentic dairy products including fresh and long-life UHT milk, dairy drinks, cream and other milk derivatives. The milk is exclusively collected from local Belgian farmers and Inex has established a long-term relationship with its suppliers. Inex manufactures private labels for leading retailers as well as products under its own name.

To increase production capacity and simultaneously reduce its environmental footprint, Inex has cooperated closely with Sidel to design and install the new aseptic packaging line that will package its UHT milk in a safe, sustainable and user-friendly PET bottle.

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Environmental considerations drive PET packaging decision

To help Inex better understand the benefits of moving from carton to white PET, Sidel supported Inex in verifying experiences and also by visiting a similar installation. “Sidel was an excellent cooperation partner. All viewpoints they offered made it clear to us how beneficial the new line would be,” comments Steven Dierickx, CEO at Inex. Some of the most important considerations focused on the fact that PET is not only a perfect match for safe and shelf-stable low acid products, but that it is also a 100% closed-loop recyclable material. In addition, production with Sidel’s Aseptic Combi Predis™, a blow-fill-seal solution with dry preform and cap sterilisation, is much more environmentally friendly. No water is consumed and very few chemicals are used to sterilise the bottle during production.

The new PET packaging for Inex’s UHT milk (skimmed, fat, etc.) in 0.5 L and 1 L formats stands out from the crowd when compared to traditional carton packaging. The white PET bottle ensures stable light barrier properties for long-life and product integrity without any aluminium foil. Sidel worked closely with the preform supplier to guarantee the preform injection quality and validate the bottle neck and cap tightness with its unique B180 test, ensuring no leakage from the bottle when horizontally stored in the fridge. “The new PET bottle contains a minimum of 25% recycled PET, is 20% lighter than other plastic (PE) bottles and therefore has a 20% lower CO₂ footprint,” comments Steven Dierickx.

Packaging line potential boosts aseptic production

“Initially, the customer favoured a special line design with some room for optimisation in the production set-up owing to the space constraints at the plant. Therefore, we suggested Inex divide the production between two buildings,” says Sébastien Sergues, Business Development Manager for Food category at Sidel. As a result, production flow on the new PET line was distributed between a plant dedicated to bottling and labelling and a warehouse designed for palletising, pallet wrapping and shipment management, with packs conveyed between the two locations. The complete PET packaging line is entirely manufactured by Sidel with an optimised End-of-Line solution.

Production starts ahead of schedule to meet extra demand for milk

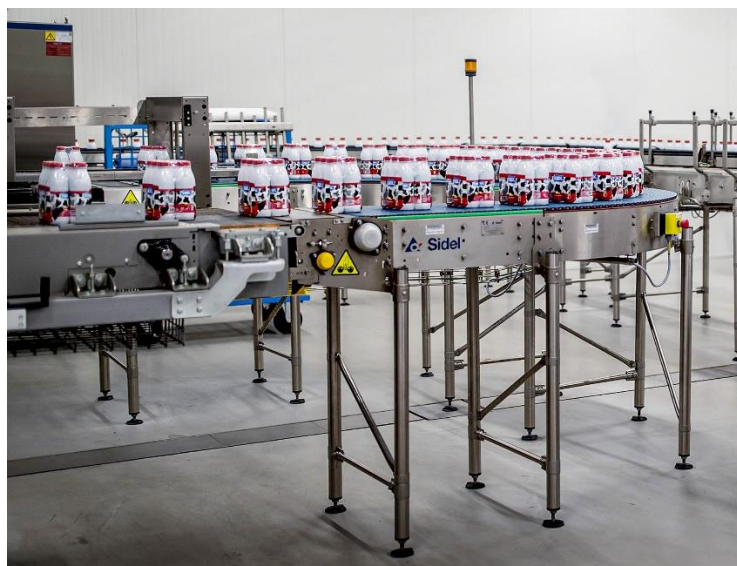
Commercial production on the aseptic line was originally scheduled to start mid-March. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the demand for milk from the local market increased rapidly and the company needed to produce the extra volume. Thanks to close cooperation between the Inex and Sidel teams, production was able to start three weeks in advance. Steven Dierickx recalls: “Fast line ramp-up ahead of schedule meant we could manage an increase in production. This was only possible

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because of the great support we received from Sidel's experts either on-site or remotely. We also jointly found a solution to increase the number of shifts from two to three."

The new aseptic PET packaging line is highly efficient and Inex has received intensive operational training to manage it. The line also opens future opportunities for high production flexibility to handle various formats and an alternative packaging method for other products, such as cream, to be packed in PET bottles.

"Last October, Queen Mathilde of Belgium visited the Inex plant to learn more about local sustainable food production. She showed a lot of interest in the subject and expressed her appreciation for our employees. We are really proud of her interest and feedback", concludes Steven Dierickx.





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Sidel is a leading provider of equipment and services solutions for packaging beverage, food, home and personal care products in PET, can, glass and other materials.

With over 40,000 machines installed in more than 190 countries, we have nearly 170 years of proven experience, with a strong focus on the factory of tomorrow with advanced systems, line engineering and innovation. Our 5,500+ employees worldwide are passionate about providing solutions that fulfill customer needs and boost the **performance** of their lines, products and businesses.

Delivering this level of performance requires that we stay flexible. We continuously ensure we **understand** our customers' changing challenges and commit to meeting their unique performance and sustainability goals. We do this through dialogue and by understanding the needs of their markets, production and value chains. In turn, we apply our solid technical knowledge and smart data analytics to ensure lifetime productivity reaches its full potential.

We call it **Performance through Understanding**.

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