

Press Release

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ABB Robots reduce labour turnover at Somerset Cheese Factory

ABB Robots enable Ilchester Cheese Ltd to improve savings across labour and materials with new automated cell

Almost two years after adding two ABB robotic cells to its production line, Ilchester Cheese Ltd, the UK's biggest producer of speciality cheeses, continues to maintain improved labour and material savings. Since the installation, product consistency and levels of productivity have also improved at the factory in Ilchester, Somerset.

The company currently exports to over 20 countries internationally and within the UK delivers its products to a wide range of food manufacturers, wholesalers, supermarkets and independent stores with both pre-packed and deli counter cheese. Recognising the need to keep up with its global competition, in 2005, Ilchester Cheese approached RTS – a high technology business supplying engineering services, products and integrated systems – with the requirement for a new automated production line to help improve labour efficiency and increase product yield.

Working as partners, RTS and ABB quickly examined the key stages of the production line to determine what the robots would need to achieve and how. The answer was to provide Ilchester Cheese Ltd with two IRB 340 Flexpicker robots, capable of handling 150 picks per minute, ensuring cheese blocks are moved quickly and precisely, one at a time, from one location to another.

Operating in two, eight-hour shifts the Flexpicker robots have now reduced labour turnover by half. Now, only two employees are needed to monitor and maintain the smooth running of the production lines, reduced from the four employees who previously carried out the task of picking and packing.

Helping Ilchester Cheese meet its own stringent requirements, ABB's Flexpicker robots can ensure Ilchester's product consistency by selecting only perfect products. As the robot scans the production line it identifies the optimum height of a block of cheese. If the product does not fit into the pre-determined height restrictions, the cheese is left on the conveyor, ready to be cut and sent through the production line again.

Tony Helyar, Engineering & Business Development Manager at Ilchester Cheese Ltd, commented: “Since installing the ABB robots, we have seen significant improvements in our productivity. Production errors have been greatly reduced, resulting in reduced wastage and increased yield on our products. The solution has been successfully in operation for over two years and has already enabled Ilchester Cheese to recoup its initial investment. Our initial requirements have all been fulfilled and we look forward to implementing robotics elsewhere in our business”

For more information about the potential benefits of integrating robots into your production process, email robotics@gb.abb.com.

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Note to Editors: ABB (www.abb.com) is a leader in power and automation technologies that enable utility and industry customers to improve their performance while lowering environmental impact. The ABB Group of companies operates in around 100 countries and employs about 111,000 people.

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Caption: ABB Robots enable Ilchester Cheese Ltd to improve savings across labour and materials with new automated cell