



NEWS RELEASE

Major Quality Role in Meat Inspection for Loma Systems' X-ray Scanner

Brawn with rye bread – a deliciously traditional combination that you can enjoy on special occasions and during specific seasons in the Netherlands and Belgium. One of the main ingredients of brawn is meat from the pig's head, which is the main speciality of J.B. Groothandel in Vlees in Vriezenveen, the Netherlands. Other than the name indicates ('groothandel' means wholesale in Dutch), J.B. Vlees is a modern pig slaughterhouse that delivers its products to many very well known names in the meat and snacks industry in the Netherlands and abroad. The international trading activities are managed by sister company WB Meat.

"We are a young, dynamic company and very progressive in everything we do," says John Bruins, Managing Director of J.B. Groothandel in Vlees. "The market has changed enormously since my father founded the company in 1980." Back then, about 30 companies in the Netherlands were active in boning pigs' heads, now only three are left. Most of these companies, which were commonly referred to as "koppenpellers" (literally "head peelers" in Dutch), were not able to keep up with the general trends in the meat industry towards scaling-up, higher quality and strict hygiene.

"Our success is the result of continual investment in improving our processes. At present we employ 65 people and process 300 tonnes of pigs' heads each week. You can only do that if you have automated your processes as far as possible and work with a quality assurance system," adds John.

The heart of the process is an automatic boning line, which has been ingeniously modified by the technical department at J.B. Vlees. John continues, "The use of this technology means that the company's production process - from the complete head to the time when the various cuts of meat go into the blast freezer after they have all been accurately sorted, inspected and packaged - takes no longer than 45 minutes." The company also complies with all HACCP guidelines and EU directives.

Pig's head meat is of high quality but is not traditionally viewed as a high-grade ingredient. Bacteriological problems used to occur in the past and the presence of teeth and bone splinters in the meat was also common. Since the process has now largely been automated, the time from the moment the pig's head enters the plant to the moment the boned meat goes into the freezer has been reduced to no more than 45 minutes.

John comments, "In the old days, when everything was done by hand, things took much longer. The process of boning a head manually is in itself quite quick, but the boned meat often lay on a table for too long in too warm an environment. Our much faster process has significantly improved the bacteriological and hygienic quality of the meat. While the move to an automated line solved all the bacteriological issues, we still needed to find a solution for the teeth and bone fragments. We already knew of Loma Systems as a supplier of excellent metal detection equipment. When we heard that they also offered X-ray inspection devices about a year ago, we immediately decided to test one of their X-ray machines."

"This was an interesting challenge for us", says Karel de Rooij, Loma's regional salesman. "The sensitivity requirements were very demanding in view of the type of product. And the environment is also pretty hostile. Machines that are used in the meat industry have to be able to withstand aggressive cleaning procedures and continue to function properly in very wet conditions."

The final solution was an X⁴ pipeline inspection unit behind a Handtmann meat pump. "Only by reducing the mass of meat to this size and by improving the uniformity of the product's presentation were we able to achieve the required sensitivity of 1.5 mm", Karel de Rooij explains.

The reject system was an additional problem. Loma's standard reject valves perform perfectly with ground meat but had difficulty with the pieces of rind in this product. John Bruins adds, "We had the choice of buying a fairly expensive system from another supplier without any guarantees, or building our own solution. We chose the latter and now have an effective and reliable reject system that diverts the meat to a sorting table when a contaminant is detected. A number of workers at the table inspect the meat by hand and remove any pieces of bone or teeth before passing the product through the X⁴ again".

John Bruins concludes, "We are very happy with the Loma X⁴. The production machine has run faultlessly from day one. Furthermore, we easily achieve the target sensitivity and can even set the machine up so that denser components like soft bones, which customers often want, are allowed to pass. The machine is easy to clean and has proved itself completely."

With Loma's help, J.B. Vlees has succeeded in achieving its goal of upgrading pig's head meat to a first-rate raw material for meat products.

