

Chase Farms comply with food processing safety standards using integrated IP surveillance, access control, time and attendance.



“We have to know exactly where each bean or cherry has come from, how it's handled, where it goes, and when; we are monitored by the FDA, MDA, and the USDA. It reflects on your company when you take measures to be more compliant. Even our long-valued customers love to receive the video clips that let them see the exact status on their orders anytime they ask for it. We can just say: Take a look for yourself - here it is!” – Brett Chase, Vice President, Chase Farms Inc.

The Challenge: The Bio-Terrorism Act that followed 9/11 demanded strict adherence to traceability standards for food products. Machinery operations, forklifts, truck deliveries and pickups add to the need for monitoring. A total of 300 employees are hired seasonally in addition to 60 full-time staff, who work in multiple buildings of tremendous size and varying temperatures.

The Solution: Milestone XProtect Enterprise IP video software will be managing over 100 cameras by the spring of 2008. Already, about 60 Axis 223 M (2 megapixel) cameras are running at the full 1600 image size to get true megapixel images. An analog DVR system from Bosch was just put in two years ago, but once they saw the clarity and detail capabilities of the Milestone-Axis IP solution, they started to replace it for the better images, using Axis video servers to convert older models. All of the camera images are now shown on large flat-panel monitors mounted on the managers' walls. ROK Systems Inc., the Certified Milestone Partner who implements the solution, chose standard Dell servers and HP network routers and switches for the IT infrastructure. The surveillance is also integrated by ROK Systems with time and attendance and access control systems.

The Advantages: Management overview is superb, quality control is optimal for meeting industry requirements, and customer satisfaction is greatly increased with ultra-clear video surveillance images of the entire facility. Production status is immediately visible, and the video is easy to share. Employee safety issues and injury claims are monitored and quickly resolved, as are any questions on shipments.

Chase Farms in Walkerville, Michigan, is leading the way in new technology for processing vegetables and fruits. Hundreds of customers include Campbell's, Heinz, Sara Lee, Conagra, and Gerber (now owned by Nestle). Chase Farms is the biggest vegetable processor in the state and one of the largest in the Eastern U.S. They own about 900 acres of land with 600 of it farmable; other goods are purchased from farmers in the rest of the state. Around 25,000 acres of farm produce are devoted to Chase Farms contractual growing needs per year.

This family-run business started in 1969 processing cherries, moving on to include asparagus, and adding more products over time with the necessary equipment and facilities. The first year, Chase processed about 150,000 pounds. In 2007 they will do over 100 million pounds of finished products.

“Four years ago we built a new 4.5 million cubic foot freezer building that together with our other freezer facilities can handle 88 million pounds of goods and 50,000 pallet positions. We go 8 pallets high: the center of that building from floor to ceiling is 44 feet tall. We added a second freezer structure shortly thereafter so our total capacity right now is 8.8 million cubic feet. Another is already planned since we are reaching capacity right now,” says Brett Chase, Vice President of Chase Farms.

Those buildings are kept at temperatures of 7-8 degrees below zero, and include docks for trucks.



Quality control in line with the Bio-Terrorism Act

Chase Farms has the latest technology in every part of their business: the food processing equipment meticulously checks all the vegetables and fruit, including whether they are the correct colors. If the hues are off, high-pressure air bursts blow them out of the production stream. Another machine specially ordered from Europe handles squash (pumpkin). Others process cherries: washing, sorting, pitting them, etc. Green beans and carrots also get washed, sorted, cut, blanched, frozen and packaged.

What drove Chase Farms towards security technology was 9/11 with the heightened threats and ensuing safety requirements. The Bio-Terrorism Act that came thereafter brought strict demands for traceability.

"This business has changed a lot since my grandfather started it. We have to know exactly where each bean or cherry has come from, how it's handled, where it goes, and when. We are monitored by the FDA, MDA, and the USDA," Brett explains.

"Another firm that grades food production is the AIB (American Institute of Bakeries) whose audit scores give bakery clients criteria for choosing suppliers. It reflects on your company when you take measures to be more compliant."

These agencies visit regularly to grade the food quality on its levels of compliance. Customers check these grades to use as a competitive parameter, so this area of the business directly affects the bottom line. The Milestone-Axis IP video surveillance system helps Chase Farms immensely in managing the quality control, providing visible proof of Chase Farms' superiority in their food processing.

Higher customer satisfaction and immediate status on orders

"Customers call to ask about the status of their shipments and can be shown or sent the images right away. Chase Farms uses the Milestone software's Smart Client interface to zoom right in and see the finest detail in the great definition of the Axis megapixel cameras," says Scott Kohsel, Vice President at ROK Systems.



"Even our long-valued customers love to receive the video clips that let them see the exact status on their orders anytime they ask for it. We can just say: Take a look for yourself - here it is!" smiles Brett.

The large Individual Quick Freeze (IQF) machines at Chase Farms freeze the vegetables and fruit individually by item; no more need for the clumps of beans frozen in blocks of water that the food industry calls 'wet packs'. Chase Farm frozen cherries, for example, are separate like pristine marbles, ready to thaw and enjoy.



Personnel and property safety; delivery issues handled

“Most of the goods packed go into a 1,400 pound bin (called a tote) that no one is going to easily steal. But we do have incidences around safety and procedures, like a forklift running into a door, which the surveillance helps us to resolve,” comments Brett. “We also had a truck company come load up, who later claimed we shorted them a tote. All we had to do was send them the video proof, so shipping issues are easily resolved, too,” reports Brett.

Milestone and Axis make the perfect IP video solution



ROK Systems initially implemented a new time and attendance system for Chase Farms several years ago, then installed an access control solution. When they learned of Chase Farms’ dissatisfaction with their DVR surveillance, they offered a better way forward with the Milestone IP video platform and Axis megapixel cameras.

“With the Milestone software networked approach and Power Over Ethernet (POE) megapixel cameras from Axis, we have great flexibility to scale up our needs as the business continues to grow,” says Brett.

ROK Systems puts the Axis cameras into Videolarm heat-blower housings to handle the cold temperatures in the freezer buildings.

Camera coverage

Scott states: “You cannot walk through the Chase production floors and not be on camera – there’s not a dead spot on their property. They’ve got cameras all over, inside and out.”

The managers given access to the Milestone software can see everything: trucks pulling in to the scales and the receiving area; products going through the machinery for cleaning, sorting, cutting, blanching, freezing, packing and shipping.

In addition to the food production areas, cameras cover the canteen and vending machines, and the locker area. Through the seasonal changes in staff, employees’ locker contents are safe under the watchful eyes of the surveillance.

Total overview of the entire facility

Vince Miskosky, Vice President of Operations at Chase Farms, is extremely pleased: “This system is so awesome! I use it all the time for total overview of everything going on. I can see where everybody is and get hold of them immediately, calling them on their radios to alert them to something that needs their attention, perhaps elsewhere in the buildings. I can see where all the products are in the lines, if things are moving too slow or too fast, if a machine has stopped.”





He continues: "All of this is really unique. We can see exactly what is going on: all the different lines in each area in different stages of their processing. We have such amazingly clear images with the Axis megapixel cameras and can zoom right in on the details using the Milestone Smart Client."

Vince describes how easy it is to use the Milestone software: he has set up his own views of cameras by groups and locations, by number and layout of the views. He likes to use the Smart Client Hot Spot feature to open a camera view in a larger window before zooming in.

"The Carousel functionality is really great, too. It runs through all the cameras in one of the windows, regardless of the views chosen, so I always have the overview of the whole place," he adds. "It works really well."

Scott clarifies that the Carousel is set to run through a different camera from the entire facility every 5 seconds.

"I think this system is just great. Everybody who comes here is so impressed – our customers think it's awesome, too. They haven't seen anything like it, so it gives us a real competitive edge," smiles Vince.

Integrated systems for highest efficiency

Scott describes how the solution includes audio capability from the Milestone XProtect Enterprise software. Among other things, this enables Chase Farms to listen to the air-burst machines that sort unacceptable product off the lines, making a popping sound. With the audio feature they will be able to both see video and hear the machines' operational status. If they are not popping enough, they are not working optimally.



ROK Systems integrated both the time and attendance system and access control with the Milestone surveillance software that triggers recording upon any entrance or exit. Chase managers can pull up the data that's time-stamped with the video and the access control. They also receive reports from the time and attendance system. Combined with the video and access control data, they can see who is supposed to be working, who is working – or not - and when, keeping track if anyone is late, etc.

"In this business, the customers' buyers have been driving demand for better service - they wanted the access control, for example. Chase Farms has gone another step beyond to proactively have this integrated with IP video," says Scott.

"We have the integration with the high-end Milestone platform that allows us to provide a best-of-breed solution with the Axis megapixel cameras and integration to the other systems," he concludes.

"The IP solution with Milestone and Axis is simply a better product, and we are very pleased with it. We show it to others in our industry, too, who are just as impressed as our customers," says Brett.



Learn more about Chase Farms at www.chasefarmsinc.org.

About ROK Systems Inc.

ROK Systems provides integrated IP based Physical Security & Time / Attendance solutions to a base of over 500 customers in the Midwest region of the United States. By using these solutions, organizations are better positioned to manage security, reduce cost, and manage on-the-ground, real-time complexity through better utilization of their IT and human resources. www.rok-systems.com

About Milestone Systems

Milestone is the world market leader for open platform IP video surveillance software, according to IMS Research. The XProtect™ product line supports the widest choice in network video hardware and API integrations with other systems. Reliable, robust and proven in operation at more than 25,000 customer installations, Milestone solutions are sold through a channel of authorized partners in 63 countries. www.milestonesys.com.

