



Thinking Inside the Box

CNP speeds up production of popular products with Quick Start's help

A little more than a decade ago, a company thought it could carve out a niche by introducing a new kind of aseptic, or sterile, packaging in the U.S. The company built a state-of-the-art facility in Pooler, Ga. and prepared to take the market by storm. It was a great proposition: milk in a sealed carton that you could leave on your pantry shelf for months. Imagine that.

Unfortunately, back in the 1980s American consumers couldn't imagine milk on a shelf, unless that shelf was inside a refrigerator. Business fizzled.

Fast forward to the 21st century. The popularity of children's juice boxes convinced consumers that what looks like waxed cardboard is actually a safe packaging for holding liquids of all kinds. Americans now rarely blink at buying products packaged in the hi-tech, layered laminate of polyethylene, aluminum foil and paper.

The Pooler facility is still the best in the country, and its new owner, CNP (California Natural Products), is one of the nation's leaders in providing aseptic packaging for soy milk, flavored beverages and high-energy nutrition drinks. Inside the plant, packaging material from large rolls is pulled into stainless steel "form, fill and seal" systems where it is shaped into a box, filled with whatever liquid product is running on that line and then sealed, all within a single, enclosed sterile environment. On each line, as many as 100 containers a minute can be "formed, filled and sealed."

"Aseptic packaging was slow to take off," said Matt McLellan, CNP's plant manager, "but today it's a booming business."



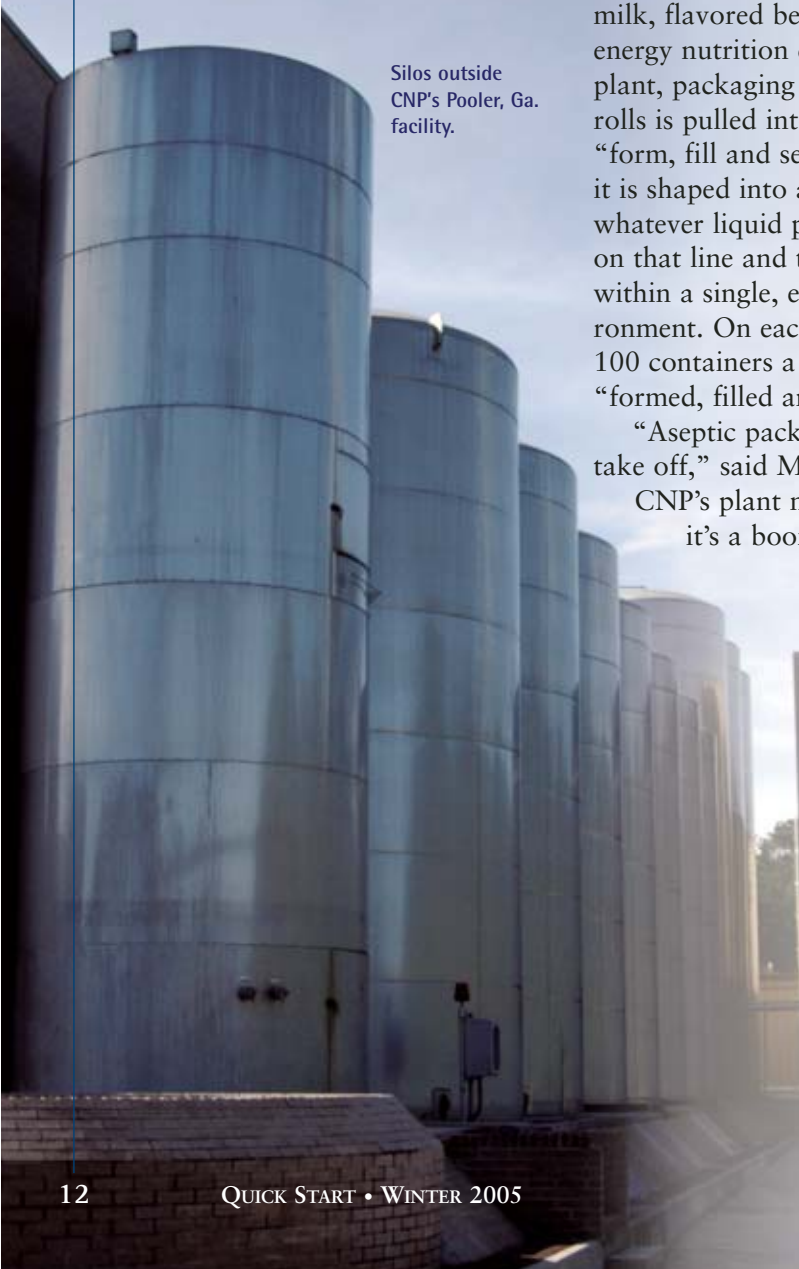
To help handle that increased business and have a presence on both the west and east coast, CNP moved into the Pooler plant in 2003. However, being a California-based business new to the Southeast, the company had some hurdles to overcome.

"This plant gave us presence on both coasts to allow us to compete with other products," said McLellan. "But we weren't linked up with other state agencies that could help us out."

That's where Quick Start came in. "Quick Start has been a crucial link in connecting us to other state agencies, as well as helping us work through the candidates applying for positions."

Beginning in 2004, Quick Start developed training for an initial group of 25 employees. The training, provided in partnership with Savannah Technical College, ranged from pre-employment assessments to post-employment training in such areas as food microbiology, mechan-

Silos outside CNP's Pooler, Ga. facility.



Matt McLellan, CNP plant manager, outside CNP's Pooler, Ga. facility.



Above: CNP's aseptic "form, fill and seal" process in operation. Below: This alcove of "valve clusters" represents the computer-controlled network of valves that monitor the flow of mixed product from the mixing tank area to the holding tank area to the filling machine area.

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- Matt McLellan,
CNP Plant Manager

ical and electrical fundamentals.

"We needed to retool the plant for new product," McLellan explained, "And to have Quick Start do this training allowed us to focus on making our business more competitive."

Another benefit of Quick Start's pre-employment assessments was a much more efficient hiring process.

"It used to be that one in 10 that applied would get interviewed and we would hire three out of 10 that were interviewed," McLellan said. "Now it's as high as 80% of those interviewed get hired. Quick Start has sped up the process and increased the quality of candidates we interview."

The value that Quick Start can add to any company's staffing plan fits in neatly with CNP's strategy for building the team at its Pooler facility.

"The leadership team is focused on building a well-trained, loyal workforce," said Ken Boyd, Quick Start's director of Eastern Operations. "CNP is not only training for the present challenges, but also establishing the foundation for future education and training initiatives.

"It has been fascinating working with a company utilizing cutting-edge processing technology. The company's commitment to employee training has been impressive," Boyd concluded. 

Tankers deliver beverages for packaging at CNP's Pooler facility.

