



Prasek's Hillje Smokehouse uses SG Systems Recipe Control and Lot Traceability to aid their expansion to new frontiers: literally to outer space!

Prasek's Hillje Smokehouse is a traditional, family business in El Campo, TX which provides some of the best sausage, jerky and other delectable foods to Texans and to consumers across the U.S. Prasek's has been pleasing customers for more than 40 years and once you taste their sausage, you're hooked. While their products are traditional, their food production processes take advantage of the latest technology to ensure the highest level of consistency and food safety for their wholesale and retail customers. I had the opportunity to speak with Mike Prasek, Jr. about their business and about how they take advantage of SG Systems Recipe Control and cradle-to-grave Lot Traceability to enhance their ability to provide great products to their customers:



Mike, can you give me a little background on Prasek's: who founded Prasek's, when was Prasek's founded and a brief history?

Prasek's was founded in 1974 by my mom and dad...in the small town of Hillje as a grocery store, feed store, meat market, saloon...no air conditioning; in the early '80's we started the meat processing business, added the grocery side and the prep side of the business...since that time it's grown to over 200 employees, 700 plus wholesale accounts...in the next 3 to 4 months we will open our doors to the snack protein business and a new retail location on I10 in Sealy Texas.

Mike, when did you get involved in the business?

I got involved in the business...actually, I started in the smokehouse at 9 years old...I got home from school at 4 or 5 o'clock and would start to work in our smokehouse...and our slaughterhouse...I became more involved in the business in '88 or '89 taking care of wholesale accounts in the Houston area, taking care of Randall's, Rice [grocery store chains] and a few other's in the Houston area. I jumped in with both feet in the business in the early 90's both on the production and the wholesale side of the business.

As your role has grown in the business, what are the biggest changes you've seen in the business overall?

I would tell you, and this is across the industry, food safety is

the biggest change that we've seen...back in the '70's we had dirt floors and some in the area actually had sawdust on the floors...it's a totally different environment today, the floors are 100% sealed...the food safety side is more challenging every day...food has to meet USDA/FSMA requirements to keep food safe.

What caused you to look for a recipe control and lot traceability solution?

Only 3 of us knew the recipes...me, my dad, and [another] gentleman...my concern was: as we grow, how do we control the recipes and keep them at a high standard, keep them current...and consistent...that was our first goal and was the initial reason we chose SG for recipe control; we had to make sure that we kept the original recipes & developed new products that were consistent; we had to be able to make the recipes easy to understand and follow [for employees], when when we weren't on site. We had to be present always, since the recipes were only committed to memory.



What role does lot traceability play in your day-to-day operations and how do you use that capability in SG Systems?

Since we started making store own brands for large retailers...and our brand...traceability was [critical]...there are two sides to traceability: one side is the need to have traceability [of every ingredient] for food safety and to manage recalls if they become necessary; traceability is also necessary for recipe control and [and product consistency] so as we deliver [finished product] to the stores I can actually see everything that goes to each customer and determine what is happening out in the field; traceability is necessary for food safety but it's also important to manage the results in the field.

Have the extensive traceability features in SG Systems enabled Prasek's to pursue business that you otherwise couldn't pursue?

It helps us sell our business when I can sit down in front of a potential customer and explain the [detailed level of traceability] that we have with the system, the accuracy and the depth of detail [for every ingredient] that we can provide, it makes for an easier sale...it's [important] both for a retailer's brand and our own brand to be able to show a large retailer...like HEB...if they have a question about ingredients or product consistency...to be able to show them every ingredient's history, down to the bags [we use for packaging]. It gives them confidence in the product and limits exposure.

Prasek's seems to be growing at a rapid pace, from what I'm observing, what's driving that growth?

The Prasek brand over the last several years has expanded beyond just the region...we have more customers that know us across the United States and they [request our brand from their retailer]; also our reputation for a quality product, if a retailer wants us to make...say a protein pack...they know that we have a reputation for making the best product; the brand recognition that we've developed over the past 10 or 15 years has been what has driven our growth to [today's levels].

Which states have retailers that carry Prasek's products?

California, Nevada, New Mexico, Colorado, Oklahoma, Kansas, Louisiana, Florida, Alabama...plus we have jerky, sausage, spices that are sold [online & mail-order] to customers nationwide, plus...how should I say it...our jerky is out of this world...we've had our jerky taken up into space.

Are you saying that your jerky is eaten at the international space station?

Yes, our jerky has been taken up all the way to the international space station.



I bet that's interesting trying to ship it, somehow, I suspect that it's hand-carried.

Yes, that's it, hand-carried.

Mike, do you think that using SG to control your product consistency has played a role in your expansion across the country?

SG System's recipe control has played a big role in managing our product quality which has definitely helped our growth; having SG's recipe control and a strong staff has made our product quality and consistency easier...not easy...but easier to manage...I don't think we could effectively run our operations today without pieces in place like SG Systems to help us make that happen.



Mike, I made the mistake of buying some of your sausage the last time I was at your store and I've become addicted, it's almost criminal and I'm in trouble with my wife because of it, what is the secret to making such a great product?

If you want to make good sausage or any good product, it starts with the raw materials. You have to start with the best quality beef and pork, consistent, good quality spices like garlic and even the salt and pepper...no fillers only good quality materials...it's only going to be as good as the raw materials going into it.

Mike, I appreciate the time you've taken for this interview, do you have anything else you would like to mention before we wrap up?

I'd like to mention that we have more capacity coming online in the next few months and we will be looking for new customers for [co-manufacturing] to help utilize that capacity...we'll be able to produce the same kind of quality products for their brands that we produce today for our other customers.

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