Putting the convenience in convenience food

Packaging is a vital part of the food supply chain. It allows consumers to transport fresh food home safely and store it until consumption. It prevents contamination and guarantees stringent hygiene standards are maintained. It can even be used as a cooking vessel and serving dish. Moreover, it serves as a medium for information transmission to the consumer. All of these functions and more are fulfilled by the packaging produced by Coopbox Group SpA.

Coopbox Group has been making packaging for the food industry for more than 40 years. The company is a leading supplier of all-in-one, flexible packaging solutions made from a variety of materials and utilizing a range of innovative approaches. “We manufacture plastic trays and film to meet the requirements of all food sectors, from basic trays made from expanded polystyrene to advanced gas barrier trays for modified atmosphere packaging,” describes CEO Emilio de Pascale. “Our trays are used for fresh and ultra-fresh foods, fish products, ready meals, fruit and vegetables through to oven-baked foods. We are leaders in Italy and Europe in this area with numerous innovative developments to our name.”

Like any sector, the food packaging industry is subject to trends. “We are gradually shifting the focus of our production output from flexible expanded polystyrene (EPS) trays to more rigid trays made from polyethylene (PET),” says Mr. Pascale. “This is the direction the market is increasingly taking, which is why we are adapting our production capacity to match.” This reorganization is one of the most important projects that Coopbox is currently working on. “We are in the middle of a process of reorientation across the group,” says Mr. Pascale. “The aim is to reconfigure our product range to better meet our clients’ needs, not just with regard to the products that we make ourselves but also by buying in products from other manufacturers with which to fill any gaps in our range. In this way, we can act as a one-stop shop for our clients.”

The company is also reorienting itself geographically in recognition of the growing importance of its export markets. Coopbox first kicked off the process of internationalization in the early 1990s with the establishment of two factories in Spain. These have since been joined by production sites and sales offices in Slovakia and France as well as two additional production sites in Italy.

Today, exports account for between 60 and 65% of Coopbox’s annual turnover of 130 million EUR. “Our most important markets are France and Spain, but we are also targeting other countries in Central and Eastern Europe where we want to expand our presence,” describes Mr. Pascale. “We target the major supermarket chains and grocery retailers as well as the packaging industry for meat and fish products.”

The Coopbox product range is tailored to meet an extensive range of needs in the fresh and ultra-fresh market. The company develops packaging solutions that prioritize customer convenience and the environment. Examples include the Naturalbox, which was the world’s first tray made from 100% biodegradable expanded PLA and DOT, a tray for ready meals capable of going straight from the freezer to the oven. “PLA is obtained from renewable feedstock and is both sustainable and completely biodegradable,” says Mr. Pascale. “It is available in expanded XPLA and rigid PLA versions and can be used with our Top Seal, Stretch and Flow Pack packaging systems.”

Coopbox has also pioneered other innovations such as its Easycook oven tray made from heat-sealable aluminium for ready meals intended for cooking in an electric or gas oven. “Easycook turns everyone into a gourmet chef,” says Mr. Pascale. “The ingredients are simply placed into the tray, which is sealed with a film ready for cooking.” Recognizing that consumers eat with their eyes, Coopbox has developed a line of attractively designed containers for the takeaway and walk-and-eat market under the name Prett-a-porter. These include cups for hot and cold drinks and tubs for ice cream. Another innovation is the Komby line of fruit and vegetable packaging featuring an innovation called its Easycook tray made from heat-sealable aluminium for ready meals intended for cooking in an electric or gas oven. “Easycook turns everyone into a gourmet chef,” says Mr. Pascale. “The ingredients are simply placed into the tray, which is sealed with a film ready for cooking.” Recognizing that consumers eat with their eyes, Coopbox has developed a line of attractively designed containers for the takeaway and walk-and-eat market under the name Prett-a-porter. These include cups for hot and cold drinks and tubs for ice cream. Another innovation is the Komby line of fruit and vegetable packaging featuring an innovation called "Easycook" which turns everyone into a gourmet chef.

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