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New line could cut pomegranate production overheads

By Jane Byrne, 18-Sep-2008

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A new production line targeted at food and beverage producers that market pomegranate products automates the separation of the peel from the arils and wraps them in MAP packaging for long-lasting shelf life, says its developer.

Israel-based Hefestus said the machinery works using water and sound-wave technology.

Oded Shtemer, CEO of Hefestus told FoodProductionDaily.com that the technology works by producing a resonance that separates the arils from the peel and the white membrane and releases the natural preservative from the skin, which coats each seed and provides natural anti-rancidity protection for longer shelf life.

"The pomegranate is an expensive fruit with delicate and sensitive arils. The demand for a full solution including long shelf-life packaging without vacuum that can damage the arils texture came from the market. It took 24 months to develop the pomegranate production line based on our proprietary technology," said Shtemer.

The company said as the line is modular, it can be adjusted to a specific plant's requirements.

Sustainable process

The system ensures continuous production and low waste, incurring relatively low costs, claims Shtemer.

"The separation of the arils from the skin automatically saves significant time and money in comparison to manual separating, while washing the fruit is done with water at room temperature, and thus, there is no need for preliminary steps such as curing or rinsing with hot water, which could damage the quality of the fruit".

The rinsing tank consists of 92 litres of water that are recycled in the production process, thus offering a sustainable method of water usage, claims Shtemer.

Multiple products

While the production line enables the production and packing of ready-to-eat pomegranates, Shtemer said the technology can also serve food producers creating products that contain pomegranate, such as dressings and jams or those who require arils for juice extraction.

According to the company, the pomegranate leads the superfruit category due to the fact that it is high in antioxidants. The European Union imports 27,000 tons of pomegranates annually and the forecast is for pomegranate consumption to double in 2010.

Processing stages

Shtemer said that the various stages of the processing line include:

- Rinsing the fruit with water at room temperature
- Cutting the pomegranate to large pieces automatically or manually
- Separating the peel from the arils and the paper-thin white membrane surrounding the seed clusters
- Drying the arils and placing them on trays
- Packing of the fruit using Modified Atmosphere Packaging (MAP)

Shelf life

He said that long-lasting shelf-life can be achieved through packing the arils in MAP using the company's patented process, Shelf Life Booster (SLB), which he claims creates modified atmosphere without drawing mechanical vacuum and also eliminates the need for synthetic preservatives.

According to Shtemer, the technology could be applied to other fruits but the company has, as yet, only trialled the machinery with pomegranates.

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