

Gold'n Plump – leading in the USA

As one drives through the rolling hills of Wisconsin and past the herds of cattle along the imposing Mississippi River you could, perhaps, be forgiven for being surprised when you come across one of the most advanced broiler hatcheries in North America.

The 60,000ft² hatchery was officially opened on 1st March 2007 as an integral part of a \$US38 million expansion of Gold'n Plump's Wisconsin operations.

This new \$US10 million hatchery is the focal point of the company's strategic plan to increase its volume of production in order to meet rising consumer demand for safer, quality food.

Flagship hatchery

The hatchery is very impressive and once you enter it you are immediately aware of the staff pride and enthusiasm for their new hatchery and the quality of the chicks being produced.

This is in no small part due to the efficiency and controllability of the Chick Master Avida single stage incubation systems that Gold'n Plump chose for their flagship hatchery.

According to Steve Jurek, Gold'n Plump's executive vice president of operations and administration, the company is extremely pleased with the new hatchery and their decision to use the Chick Master equipment.



Gold'n Plump's new flagship hatchery in Wisconsin, USA.

"The whole installation went very well. Chick Master has been an excellent partner – a testament to how two companies can work together to achieve something great," Steve told International Hatchery Practice.

Tom Solberg, the breeder hatchery manager agreed and added that Chick Master had been extremely helpful from the start.

"The project manager took time to answer all our questions and was very thoughtful in his responses. He needed to be because I ask tough questions! I was satisfied and I do not say that very often," Tom added.

Gold'n Plump is a family owned, fully integrated provider of premium chicken products to retail, delicatessen and food service customers throughout the Midwestern USA and to many other parts of the US.

Their first hatchery was built in St. Cloud, Minnesota in 1926 by the founder, E. M.

Helgeson. Today, the company is run by his grandson, Mike Helgeson, who leads a team of over 1,500 people including more than 250 family farmers.

Expansion study

Jurek and his team conducted a six month expansion study to determine the best location for future growth. After determining its Wisconsin operations had the most potential for improving efficiency and aiding the long term success of the company the decision was taken to locate the new hatchery there. Then Gold'n Plump began researching hatchery technology options and this included many meetings with Chick Master.

They made visits to 10 hatcheries, including facilities using machines from various

Continued on page 13

The Chick Master Avida single stage incubation system.





Fully automated hatchery using the Chick Master 54 egg flat.

Continued from page 11 other suppliers as well as ones using Chick Master machines, before it was decided to buy Chick Master single stage equipment for the new hatchery in Independence, Wisconsin.

According to Bill Petz, Gold'n Plump's director of Arcadia operations, his team subjected the various options to rigorous examinations and evaluations. "We were looking for a total solution," Bill told us.

"We needed equipment with round the clock technical support, quick to respond on-site support, and rapid parts delivery service. On top of it all, we needed the equip-

ment delivered and installed within five months of our decision to give the project the green light."

Chick Master was able to meet all of these requirements, including a rigorous trial of the equipment to the full satisfaction of Gold'n Plump's team.

The Avida single stage system was evaluated in Arcadia and St. Cloud and the company saw better chick quality, growth rate, egg viability (as the flock ages) as well as improved feed conversions.

"On all levels, what we tested looked very positive," Bill told us. "The machines were cost effective and helped add to our investment incentive for a better return."

1.2 million chicks per week

Currently, the new hatchery has the capacity to produce 1.2 million chicks per week from the 36 Chick Master Avida, A18, single-stage setters and 12 Avida A12 machines that have been installed. At full capacity, the group will have more than four million eggs in the incubation process at any time. These eggs are supplied by approximately 300,000 breeder hens that are looked after by independent farmers affiliated to Gold'n Plump.

The ability to accurately control the atmosphere inside the single stage setter cabinets was the key to the improvements seen in chick quality and performance.

"Control of the entire facility with Galaxy is a great help. It works really well – especially the ability to tweak the control for a particular egg age," Tom told us. "Different age flocks also require different incubation environments. Anyone who has multi-stage systems, new or old, knows that you basically shoot for the middle (the average) and hope for the best. That is the way it is."

"Now our expectations have risen way beyond that as with Avida systems you have constant control of the environment within each setter. I used to be committed to multi-stage but now I see and really appreciate the benefits that the precise environmental control of all of the eggs in the machine can bring to the table. In the end, we get much better chick quality and an even better hatchability.

"Also, it is difficult to clean multi-stage systems unless you programme in some down time. With the single stage Avidas when the set is complete, the setter is empty!

"You can thoroughly clean it and start the next set in a totally clean machine.

"We are constantly developing programmes for young, prime and old flocks. Older eggs definitely need different conditions from the younger eggs. Our smaller A12 Avida machines come in very useful when we have to isolate smaller numbers of eggs that have been stored longer than usual and now we can change the setter's stage programme accordingly."

Bill Petz agreed. "Of course you can sanitise after every set, but we especially liked the ability to tightly control the atmosphere within the cabinet.

"For the first time, we could tailor our incubation parameters around egg age and flock age."

Gold'n Plump is already seeing benefits from their Avida systems. In particular this includes more chicks within the desired weight range, improved chick quality, improved feed conversion, better hatchability, livability and, very importantly, reduced cost per chick. Once the new hatchery was operational the results were even better than expected!

Now the company sees much better chick quality as all the chicks come off together with no signs of dehydration. From a hatchery person's perspective, the real early chicks and the real late chicks are brought to the middle and the resulting chicks from a tighter hatch window are better able to go straight to feed and to start eating sooner and growing quicker.

Improved chick quality

Currently Gold'n Plump is seeing, on average, an improved hatch of around 1.5% and this results in more viable chicks. The company is also seeing improvements in the grow-out performance on the farms as a result of this improved chick quality and the tighter hatch window.

"It is early in the process, but first results indicate that daily weight gain is increasing," Bill told us. "The reports show that our birds are growing faster – and we have had to react to this because of size constraints at our processing plant. It is a nice problem to have, but as of yet, we have not put any numbers to it. We need more experience to know exactly how to handle this good problem."

Steve Jurek added, "Sometimes it is difficult to pinpoint why the growth we see has really taken off. However, we know that the new hatchery facility and our Chick Master machines are key contributors to the improved performance.

"It is a magnificent achievement and, to date, the most advanced in the USA that I know of. We have a great facility with great performance." ■

Left to right, Tom Solberg, Bill Petz and Steve Jurek of Gold'n Plump and Robert Holzer, president of Chick Master.

