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Food manufacturer adds ABB drive to the mix

ABB drive and control package helps Baxters Food Group to increase its production capabilities by introducing hot fill production at its Colchester site.

Baxters Food Group is using an ABB variable speed drive (VSD) to help ensure consistent mixing of its range of sauces, dressing and marinades. The drive is used to adjust the mixer motor's speed to that required for a particular product.

Installed on a 750 kg capacity holding vessel, the VSD is used to mix sauces and other products at an elevated temperature – a process known as hot fill. This process pasteurises the product, preventing spoilage and prolonging shelf life.

Baxters Foods Group produces a wide range of soups, sauces, condiments, dressings, preserves, pies and meal accompaniments from manufacturing sites across the UK and Poland. Previously, it had only produced cold fill products at the Colchester site, but it wanted to expand production by manufacturing hot fill sauces and marinades.

The tank, which had not been used for several years, was re-located from one of the other manufacturing sites in the group. It featured a steam-heated jacket that made it suitable for the hot fill process, but had no controls or electrical supply. Baxters needed a power and control solution that would turn the vessel into a fully usable asset, so contacted ABB authorised value provider Gibbons Engineering Group for advice.

Tony Bellian, European Technical Director for Baxters, says: "The holding vessel is vital to the production of our hot fill sauces. Without its agitation and heating capability we would struggle to meet the required levels of product consistency and thermal process. This would potentially compromise the high-quality standards of the product range."

Gibbons designed, built and installed a stainless steel-enclosed control panel, which incorporates a 4 kW ABB micro drive to control the speed of the holding vessel's agitator via a door mounted potentiometer. The VSD enables the speed of the mixer to be adjusted from 30 to 80 rpm, ensuring the hot fill sauces are agitated at a consistently controlled speed to give the correct end product quality.

The control panel also controls the temperature of the steam. This is adjusted to suit different product recipes.

The project involved fitting associated cabling, along with setting up and testing the panel. The control panel took four weeks to fabricate and a day to install on site.

Bellian says: "We had a tight deadline of two months to produce, install and test the solution. Gibbons was ready to conform with all of the working requirements associated with a food production environment. In addition, they were very cost competitive."

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Caption: Baxters is using an ABB variable speed drive to achieve consistent end product quality for its range of sauces and marinades.

For more information please contact:
Layla Hewitt
Marketing Communications
Phone: 01925 741517
Email: layla.hewitt@gb.abb.com

ABB Ltd.
Daresbury Park
Daresbury
Warrington WA4 4BT

Emma Jenkinson
Armitage Communications
Phone 020 8667 2218
Email: emma.jenkinson@armitage-comms.co.uk