

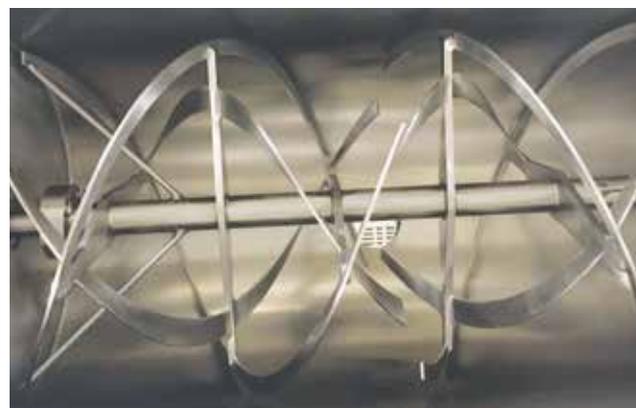
RIBBON BLENDER HELPS GRANOLA MAKER QUADRUPLE PRODUCTION

New equipment installation provides faster mixing and repeatable results while enhancing overall plant efficiency.

JOYCE FASSL EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

VIKI GUTSKO embodies some of the best characteristics of the modern-day mom. She loves cooking, she is committed to making healthy, homemade meals for her three daughters, and, today, she's leading her own food manufacturing business.

When Gutsko's oldest daughter requested her mother's homemade granola for the school bake sale, no one knew this would be the start of something much bigger. Viki's granola was a huge hit, and then the calls started coming in from the school nurse, the vice principal and the community for more of the healthy, all-natural treat. Soon, Gutsko was buying 50-lb. bags of oats to keep up with the demand.



Installation of a 10-cu.-ft. Ross ribbon blender with all stainless-steel wetted parts reduced labor and increased output for Viki's Foods.



Viki's Foods manufactures granola in five flavors: blueberry almond, apple cinnamon, banana walnut, maple cranberry and original, shown here, in 12-oz.-resealable pouches. Photo courtesy of Viki's Foods.

At first, she rented a 1,200-sq.-ft. former bakery to produce her granola. As consumers switched from traditional cereals to non-GMO and gluten-free foods over the past few years, Viki's Foods needed to expand its output. In early 2015, production moved to a new facility in Bethpage, New York, that is SQF level 2 certified. Six years after the first product was made, Viki's granola is in national distribution at major retail outlets. The company manufactures granola in five flavors: original, blueberry almond, apple cinnamon, banana walnut and maple cranberry in 12-oz. resealable pouches and 1.5-oz. single-serve portions in eight-pack sleeves.

Just two years ago, the company was mixing and packaging its product by hand. Gutsko's brother and company vice president, Greg Gutsko, began an online search for suppliers of fragile ingredients handling equipment and found industrial mixing, blending, drying and dispersion equipment maker Charles Ross & Son.

After conducting several tests on the granola in its pilot plant, "Charles Ross worked to achieve the end result Viki wanted," says Svetlana Mertvoy, business administration manager at Viki's Foods. Installation of a 10-cu.-ft. Ross ribbon blender with all stainless-steel

CASE STUDY

wetted parts reduced labor and increased output for the all-natural granola maker.

The blender installed at Viki's consists of a U-shaped trough and a horizontal agitator shaft with helical flights or "ribbons." The inner and outer ribbons are pitched in opposite directions, promoting axial and radial flow of batch materials. The Ross blender features precisely fabricated ribbons, tightly controlled clearances, a solid agitator shaft and compact gear-motor direct drive design. These features translate to several benefits for Viki's: fast mixing, repeatable results, reliable and quiet operation, and long service life.



After installing the Ross ribbon blender, only two operators are dedicated to mixing granola at Viki's Foods.

Previously, Viki's had eight to 10 people mixing ingredients at the start of the day, and then they moved on to other plant-floor jobs. Now only two operators are dedicated to mixing. With the new ribbon blender in place, Viki's was able to create two employee teams to bake and pack products simultaneously.

"After the Ross equipment was installed, capacity was quadrupled. We reduced processing staff by four and no longer needed temporary help," states Christine Busse, senior operations manager and SQF practitioner at Viki's Foods. "People can now stay dedicated to their tasks."

The sticky nature of the granola mixture causes it to build up, so staff does a complete washdown and sanitization process multiple times a day. Busse says the ribbon blender is easy to washdown. "Every surface is accessible, and we can access all parts of the machines. It is very easy for the operator to clean," she says.

Return on investment for the ribbon blender was one year. "The machinery is very well built," adds Busse. **PFW**

Charles Ross & Son

www.mixers.com