

Case – Shiny Hill Farms

Shiny Hill Farms is a major pork processor, specializing in smoked meats, hams, sausages, and luncheon meats. The firm's largest facility slaughters more than 5,000 hogs each day.

Throughout the food industry, quality is a high priority, and Shiny Hill Farms is no exception. The quality assurance department (QA) seeks to prevent any defective products from reaching the consumer. QA's primary concern is for controlling product weight, appearance, and shelf life throughout the manufacturing operations. Production operators are held accountable for their cuts on specific meat products. The cuts must be performed according to quality assurance specifications in order to obtain high yields. (Yield is the percentage of the live weight of the hog that can be sold.)

Quality assurance monitors all operations, from the killing of hogs through packaging. QA personnel inspect incoming animals, work with USDA inspectors, and monitor cooking temperatures. They check scales daily to ensure they are providing correct weights. If products fall outside specifications, it is the responsibility of QA personnel to notify operators that changes need to be made to bring quality up to standard. Many QA personnel monitor weights of packaged boxes continuously to ensure that they conform to weight specifications. They open boxes and weigh the packages as well as checking them for defects such as rips, leaks, and pinholes. Weights of packages near the bottom, mid and top of each skid (pallet) are inspected. If these packages conform to weight specifications, then the entire skid is accepted and sent to the warehouse. If not, the skid is tagged for 100 percent in on, and the process is studied to determine why the variations occurred. QA personnel analyze graphs of yields and packaging waste weekly.

Other functions throughout the company focus on quality. The sanitation department, for example, sanitizes all manufacturing machines and work surfaces before initial production runs each day. The research and development department plays an important role in improving quality. For example, it is continually seeking out and testing new methods of curing meat and of killing bacteria more effectively and efficiently. R&D also helps to develop new packaging that may improve consumers' perception of quality. In addition, it develops new products, such as "lite" luncheon meats that contain less fat and cholesterol, enlisting the aid of focus groups and taste panels.

A food processing plant is an intense, high-speed manufacturing setting. Shiny Hill Farms operators may have to make as many as 10 cuts each minute on a conveyor line. Engineering personnel replaced all old manufacturing lines with ergonomically correct lines. The

production line was redesigned to a standard height with adjustable height work stations to better meet operators' needs. Turnover of meat cutters averages between 30 and 40 percent. New cutters are shown a video on how to use machines and knives correctly in order to make quality cuts. On the line, they are expected to learn from experience-watching others and learning from their mistakes.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the scope of quality efforts in this organization.
2. What is the role of the quality assurance department at Shiny Hill Farms? Does it promote the concept of total quality?
3. What suggestions do you have for improving Shiny Hill Farms' quality effort?