

Decker Manufacturing Redefines Success

A leader in the agricultural products industry for more than 130 years, Decker Manufacturing is known for its high-quality products and customer service. And while Decker's history is strong, Marty Fox, president, knows that innovation is the way to keep the company growing and maintain its global competitive edge.

Innovation Starts with Education

Last fall, Fox attended a CIRAS-led workshop that introduced the Sustainable Economies Program. With knowledge gleaned from the workshop and a desire to learn more, Fox contacted Mike O'Donnell and Jim Poe of CIRAS. Together they worked on a sustainability assessment, focusing on Decker's triple bottom line—the financial, social, and environmental aspects of the company. This assessment provided the team at Decker with a broad understanding of opportunities across the business. Combined with the company priorities, Decker was able to see a clear path toward improvement.

Short-Term Goals Set in Motion

Several short-term goals were immediately identified. First, there was a need for floor space planning. "We had to work within the confines of the existing building," explains O'Donnell. "In order to create capacity for growth, Decker needed to organize its work space to gain greater efficiency."

CIRAS suggested starting with a Lean manufacturing tool, 5S, to organize the plant. The 5S process relies on employees taking control of their work areas and implementing improvements. "The results of this process were amazing," says Fox. "We started on the press room and the tool shop and have made great strides already."

An improved inventory control system has started as well. Decker recently rented new warehouse space where raw materials are shelved and clearly labeled with placards for easy identification.

With help from the CIRAS team, Decker applied for a grant to purchase new inventory control software. "We have made big inroads with inventory control already, but a new automated system with bar code readers will bring everything up to date," says Fox.



Decker also investigated the benefits of outsourcing their high-volume brush blocks versus manufacturing them in-house. They determined that local outsourcing in this case made financial sense. "We are now working with a manufacturer located in Mount Pleasant to purchase this product," says Fox. "At a savings of 3¢ to 5¢ per block with 20,000 blocks each delivery, it's a win/win opportunity."

Decker Realizes Greater Profits

Implementation of these near-term projects has paved the way for big impacts. In addition to the outsourcing strategy, Fox is very proud of the other cost-recovery processes that have been put in place.

A new brush-filling machine was purchased in December. It provides double the output of the machine that was replaced, yet maintains the same floor plan footprint. Fox plans to purchase a second machine to keep up with the current sales volume.

"The Green 101 and Dumpster Dive workshops led by CIRAS have given Decker very tangible results," says Fox. A metal recycling service dumpster that was installed in April has already earned \$1,700. A second load is almost ready for recycling and will provide a similar payout. Decker is now actively recycling all paper and their aluminum, brass, and copper.

With all these new strategies in place, Decker Manufacturing has realized a gain of 10 percent in sales since September 2011. "The partnership with CIRAS is definitely working for us," says Fox. "Our new processes are holding prices down by reducing our costs."

Fox is quick to credit his employees for the company's success, and he values their contributions. "If it weren't for them, we wouldn't be where we are today."

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