

New company invests in future of MAP*

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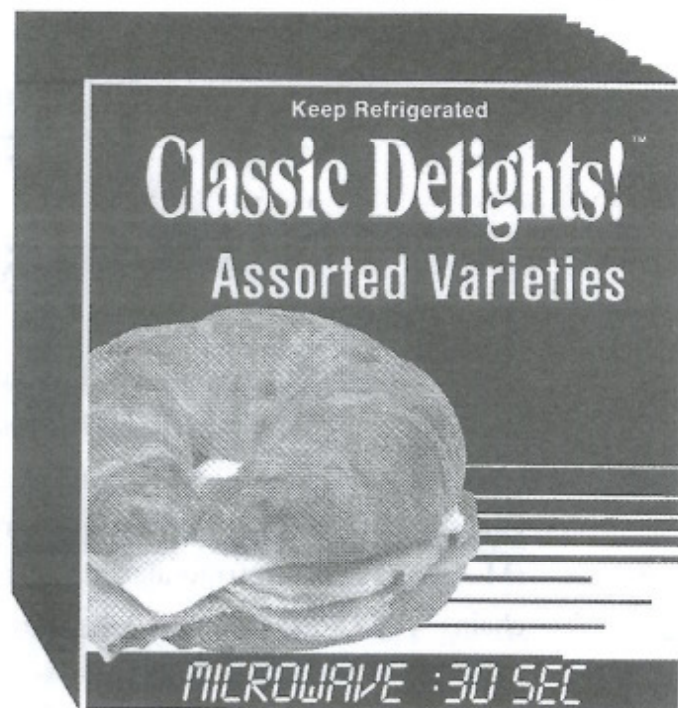
Classic Delight Inc., St. Marys, OH, was established in August 1987, with the express purpose of producing and marketing prepared, refrigerated sandwiches in modified atmosphere packaging. Company President Darl Harkleroad has background in the meat business and has closely followed industry trends and the fresh vs frozen debate. He sensed that microwaveable pre-cooked meat sandwiches in refrigerator-safe, extended-shelf-life packaging could offer consumers a convenience and eating quality beyond what was currently available in the various lines of frozen sandwiches. He believed that consumers would respond very well to these types of products.

The new company is a testament to the confidence Harkleroad and his staff have in the future of prepared, microwaveable foods in refrigerated modified atmosphere packaging. To test their vision, they developed an 8-item line of MAP precooked sandwiches which moved into markets in Columbus, OH and Detroit, MI in August 1987. The line includes char-broiled hamburgers and

char-broiled cheeseburgers on Kaiser rolls, and 6 croissant sandwich varieties—ham & cheese, roast beef & cheese, sausage & cheese, turkey & cheese, turkey, ham cheese, and corned beef & cheese.

The line is produced at Classic Delight's St. Marys, OH plant. A form/fill/vacuumize/gas flush/seal machine runs special barrier rollstock film. The machine forms a pouch, deposits a sandwich, vacuumizes the pouch and back flushes with a nitrogen/carbon dioxide gas blend, and seals the pouch. The barrier film traps the gas mix inside the pouch where it works in combination with refrigerated temperatures to maintain product freshness and extend shelf life. Harkleroad has told FP that, while the packages are being code dated for 45-day shelf life, the actual shelf life being achieved is more in the range of 90 days.

Specifically developed for microwave heating, the sandwiches bear overcarton instructions advising consumers to remove the sandwich from the film pouch before microwaving. The



Consumers have responded well to the refrigerated MAP sandwiches.

company has found that heating the product out of the pouch enhances the desirable texture of the croissants and Kaiser rolls.

Darl Harkleroad notes that his company is leading the way in bringing this new category of products to the marketplace and that consumer reception to the new line has been very good. The company's marketing strategy is 3-pronged: 1) attract retailer (and foodservice operator) interest by pointing out the extended shelf life benefits of the MAP; 2) position the product in the fresh meat or deli case where it is likely to get high consumer attention; and 3) emphasize the convenience and microwaveability of the product. Following the success of the initial market introduction, Classic Delight has begun phasing into new market areas in Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Chicago.

* As seen in *Food Processing*, March 1989.