

Success comes from a load of hot air

Thanks to a lot of hot air from Cretors' Flow-Thru-80 machine, success for Garrett Popcorn is in the 50-lb bag

Garrett Popcorn Shops, based in Chicago, Illinois, takes great pride in its use of all-natural ingredients – from its popping kernels to its CNH sugar, one of the finest sugar from Hawaii.

“The key to our success is making sure that our final popcorn product is just as good as the ingredients we use,” said Garrett Popcorn Shops quality assurance manager, Mr Brian Baranski. “My job is to make sure our stores are producing what we’re known for – what made us who we are. If a particular batch isn’t up to our standards, we won’t sell it.”

Garrett Popcorn Shops has indeed achieved remarkable success since its inception in 1949. The company currently has six locations in Chicago, including two at O’Hare airport, and another one coming to Michigan Avenue, and has recently expanded with three new stores in New York City. The company has garnered particular acclaim for its “Mix”, a cheese corn and caramel crisp popcorn mix that is one of Oprah Winfrey’s favourites.

“We get a large order from Oprah every year,” said Mr Baranski. “When this perfect blend of sweet and savoury was on ‘Oprah’s Favourite Things’, our Internet sales went through the roof.”

One of the ways that Garrett Popcorn Shops has made sure that their end product is as good as its ingredients is by working with C. Cretors and Company, a designer and manufacturer of food processing and concession equipment for over 120 years. Cretors is mostly known for its popcorn machine innovation and quality, and Garrett Popcorn Shops has relied on these machines throughout its history.

Garrett Popcorn Shops primarily uses Cretors’ industrial-sized FT200 (which produces 200 lbs of popcorn per hour) at its Chicago west side warehouse where the company makes most of the popcorn that it sells through the Internet. In its stores, Garrett Popcorn Shops has for decades been working with (and very happy with) Cretors’ 685 rotary popper, but recently Garrett Popcorn Shops has begun an upgrade to machines using Cretors’ Flo-Thru production technology and their Flo-Thru 80 Popper (FT-80).

80 lbs in an hour

“We first started using the FT-80 in our New York City 5th Avenue location, where we have a large kitchen and a lot of customers,” Mr





Baranski said. "Being New York, where there's a lot of foot traffic and people are often in a hurry, we needed a machine that could produce a lot of product in a short amount of time. The machine also had to be easy to use. The FT-80 perfectly fit the bill."

The FT-80 is an automatic continuous dry popper. It uses Cretors' hot air suspension system patented in 1965, which eliminates the need for using fattening oils to create a healthier finished product. Instead, kernels are popped with a steady current of hot air which provides uniform heating and ensures the optimal popping temperature.

Mr Baranski elaborated: "It's a steady-flow product that allows for increased production. With some of the poppers, you have to manually load one scoop at a time, let that pop, and then load another scoop. It can take a lot of time. But with the FT-80, we can put in a 50-lb bag of raw corn, turn it on and it's going to either pop that 50 lbs to completion or stop when we tell it to stop."

Also, with the digital temperature control, the FT-80 is easy to use. The digital temperature control eliminates the guesswork associated with popping corn by allowing the operator to set an exact temperature for maximum kernel expansion.

"This popper is very easy for cooks to use," continued Mr Baranski. "It holds a 50-lb bag of popcorn that's super easy to fill. And the system's three-button control allows even employees that don't speak English to perform error-free operation. They just hit start, fill the container with the corn and pull open the feed slot, sending the product into the heat tunnels. The end result is perfectly popped popcorn, and a lot of it. When we can produce 80 lbs of popcorn in a single hour, we can meet the highest demand."

Popping the corn and fitting the space

Garrett Popcorn Shops has gradually been replacing its older machines with the new FT-80 Popper and Coater machines. They have been using the FT-80 at the 5th Avenue shop for about a year and half, and have added an FT-80 at a Chicago O'Hare Airport store and as a back-up popper at their Chicago warehouse.

"The FT-80 fits our demand needs, and it also fits our available spaces," said Mr Baranski. "There's not a lot of room at our current locations, but the FT-80 has a small footprint. It's a real easy transition to just pull out the old machine and replace it with the new one, without ever having to do any

construction or remodeling."

Mr Baranski says he has never found anything that can compete with the Cretors equipment. He knows there are other options out there, but he has never felt the need to test any of the competitors' machines.

"We've stuck with what works," he said. "When it comes to popping corn, and you need to produce a lot, Cretors are the ones to turn to. There are barely any problems – almost none – but if something comes up, they'll come out or guide us through the solution over the phone. They'll do whatever it takes to fix the problem in a timely manner."

Clearly, Mr Baranski and everyone at Garrett Popcorn Shops is more than satisfied with Cretors equipment. And Garrett Popcorn Shops' customers also support the company's decision to stay with Cretors' 50-lb bag by 50-lb bag.

Mr Baranski concluded with this kernel of wisdom: "Cretors' equipment pretty much pops the perfect kernel every time. And our customers wouldn't settle for anything less." **FBA**

