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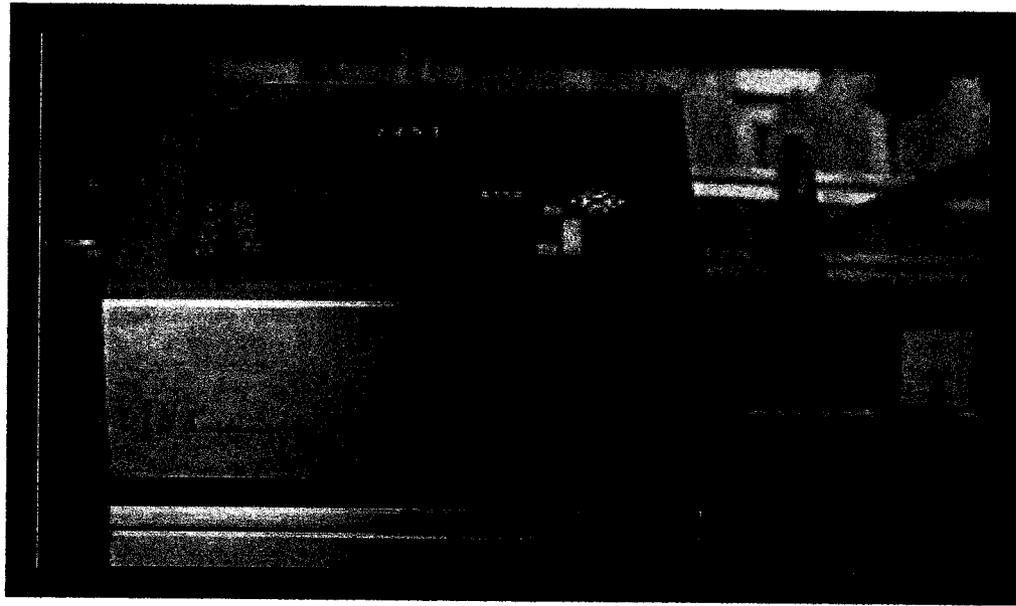
**Case History - Jan. '99**

- Products: Linx
- Industry: Dairy

## Meadow Gold milks coding machinery

It wasn't too long ago that a one-line, 12-digit code was all that Southern Foods was able to hot-stamp onto its one-gal, high-density polyethylene jugs of Meadow Gold-brand milk. Now the Delta, CO, dairy can print up to four lines of type, including a customized message to accommodate special promotions.

that applies a pressure-sensitive label on a container body panel. The hot-stamper still stamps the label with the same code date and plant number that the ink jet codes on the container shoulder, but now the hot-stamped information serves as more of a back-up code. After labels are hot-stamped and applied, the Linx 6200 prints codes onto the shoulder of the bottle.



*HDPE containers convey past this small-character ink jet that prints a variety of information onto the container's shoulder.*

There are no unusual environmental challenges posed by humidity or temperature.

"We used to hot-stamp a use-by date and our plant code number onto a label [that's applied] to the side of the container," says Mark Ownby, the Delta plant manager. That date was hard to find both for consumers and retail workers. Seeing code dates is important to store employees in rotating stock so that containers with fast-approaching use-by dates are displayed in front of those with a later use-by date.

To alleviate the limitations of hard-to-see dates and limited code information, the dairy purchased a Linx 6200 Series small-character continuous ink-jet printer made in England and distributed in the U.S. by Diagraph (St. Louis/Earth City, MO). "We use the coder on our one-gallon jugs," Ownby explains. The coder prints directly onto the container's shoulder, which is easily visible to store employees and consumers.

The Delta plant extrusion/blow-molds its own HDPE containers. Molded containers are conveyed to a labeler

A simple description of the ink-jet process: Black, fast-drying methylethyl ketone ink, also from Linx, is pumped from a reservoir through a nozzle in stream form. A piezo-electric device uses vibration to change the stream of ink to droplets. The droplets pass between two deflector plates that remain at a constant voltage to form a force field. Charged droplets travel through a printhead onto the shoulder of the milk jug. Droplets not charged are collected in a gutter in the printhead and recycled back to the ink reservoir. Coded containers then move on to filling and capping. Refrigerated jugs are distributed in western Colorado.

"The main reason we bought the coder was so the consumer could see the code date and information easier," says Ownby. "It's much easier to see that at the shoulder area because a shopper no longer has to reach down and lift the jug to read the code. Instead, he or she can just look at the container in the refrigerated case."

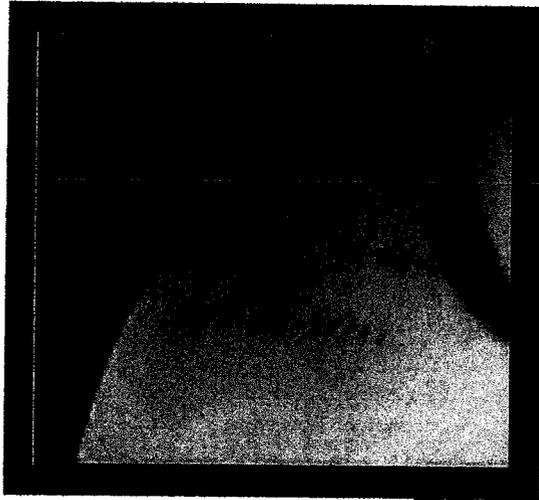
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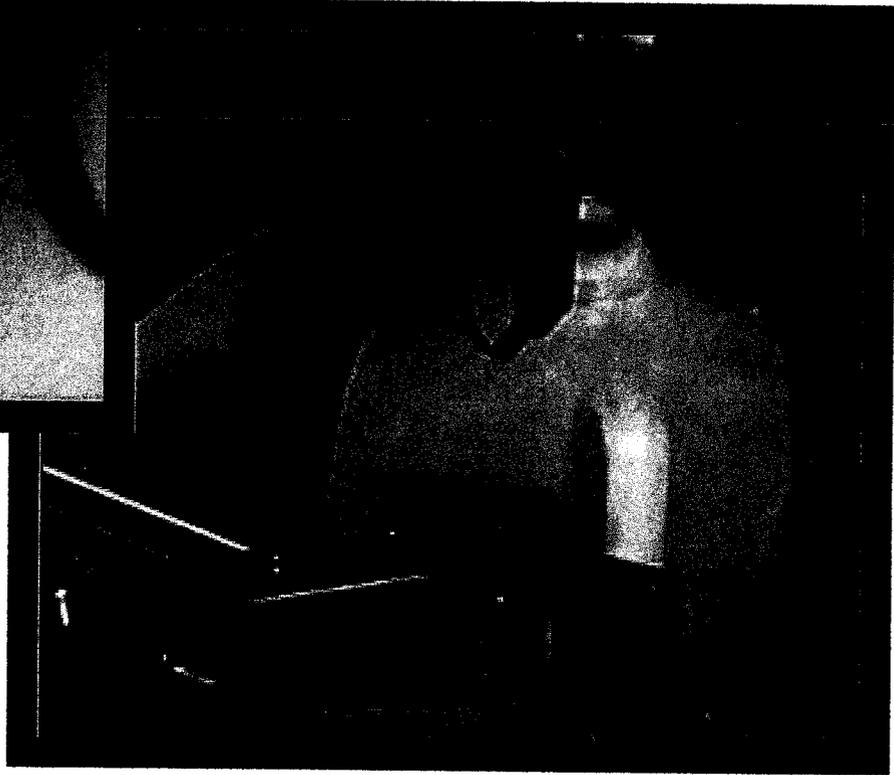
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*The ink-jet code applied  
in-line to the shoulder of  
milk jugs makes it easy for  
retail store employees and  
consumers to see and read  
use-by date codes.*



"We also like the fact that we can personalize messages," he continues. "We can add 'Happy Holidays,' or 'Milk is better if kept below forty degrees,' 'School is back in session, please watch for kids on the street,' or 'Try our egg nog.'"

Just how the marketing messages translate into additional sales isn't certain. "And we don't know the

exact return on investment for the coder," says Ownby. "But the important thing is that it's given us more versatility in our operations, and we see it as a tool for communicating with the consumer."

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