

Uonuma Mizunosato Factory Has Come on Stream

Table Mark Co., Ltd. is the core of the JT Group's food business. In November 2010, TableMark started operating the Uonuma Mizunosato Factory, which represents the essence of the expertise and know-how it has accumulated. The factory, which produces frozen wheat noodle and packed rice products, is conducting activities to foster friendship with local communities in a rich natural environment while maintaining the highest standards of food safety and quality.

Providing Excellent Taste Nurtured by Snow Water

Uonuma City, at the foot of the "Three Majestic Mountains of Echigo," including Mt. Hakkai, is endowed with abundant high quality water and clean air. Through a long natural process, snow water from the mountains seeps into the ground and becomes purified and acquires a mellow taste. This water, selected as one of the "100 Best Water Sources," is used to cook rice and boil wheat noodles. The qualities of this water are best suited to the simple raw materials used in these products. That is why this region has been selected as the site. The high quality water enhances the taste of products while the clean air helps to keep the factory hygienic. If we are to continue to enjoy the benefits of the environment, we bear grave responsibility for preventing factory waste from polluting the air and water.

The nearby Uono River is naturally pristine, with salmon coming upriver to spawn. To avoid damaging this environment, before operating the new factory, TableMark set up a committee to monitor water quality together with Uonuma City and the local fishermen's association. The factory has adopted eco-friendly equipment. For example, it has reduced the amount of harmful substances in its waste water to a tenth of the limit set by Niigata Prefecture by using purification equipment. As its heat source, the factory uses natural gas, which emits a relatively small amount of CO₂, and its freezer facility uses a non chlorofluorocarbon coolant.

Unique 140-Meter-Long Production Line

In the construction of the factory, particular consideration was

given to how to speed up the production process and ensure sanitation and safety management as well as reducing the environmental impact right from the design stage. As a result, a unique 140-meter-long straight production line was created. Taking advantage of the spacious premises, with an area of 60,000 square meters, the factory arranges all production processes, from moving raw materials out of the warehouse to packaging finished products, in a straight line. The arrangement makes it easy to set a sanitary zone apart from other areas and also helps to prevent accidents by securing a clear view. In addition, the production line management can be streamlined. Moreover, the simple line arrangement has reduced machinery breakdowns, realizing the full benefit of the production capacity of the advanced equipment.

The factory produces 21,000 units of frozen wheat noodles and 6,000 packs of rice per hour. Safety and security is enhanced by the traceability system, which keeps production records of each unit so as to enable follow-up tracing.

Untiring Efforts Ensure Safety and Quality

Even at a factory using advanced systems, workers continue to play a critical role. The factory employs around 70 workers, including those transferred from other factories as well as new recruits. As they work on a two-shift system and the production line is automated, communication at the factory could be sparse. To invigorate communication, a monthly "group activity" has been introduced. Workers present their own proposals, such as revising the data input procedures to increase efficiency and installing elevated platforms that enable shorter workers to have a full view of the factory floor. At each meet-



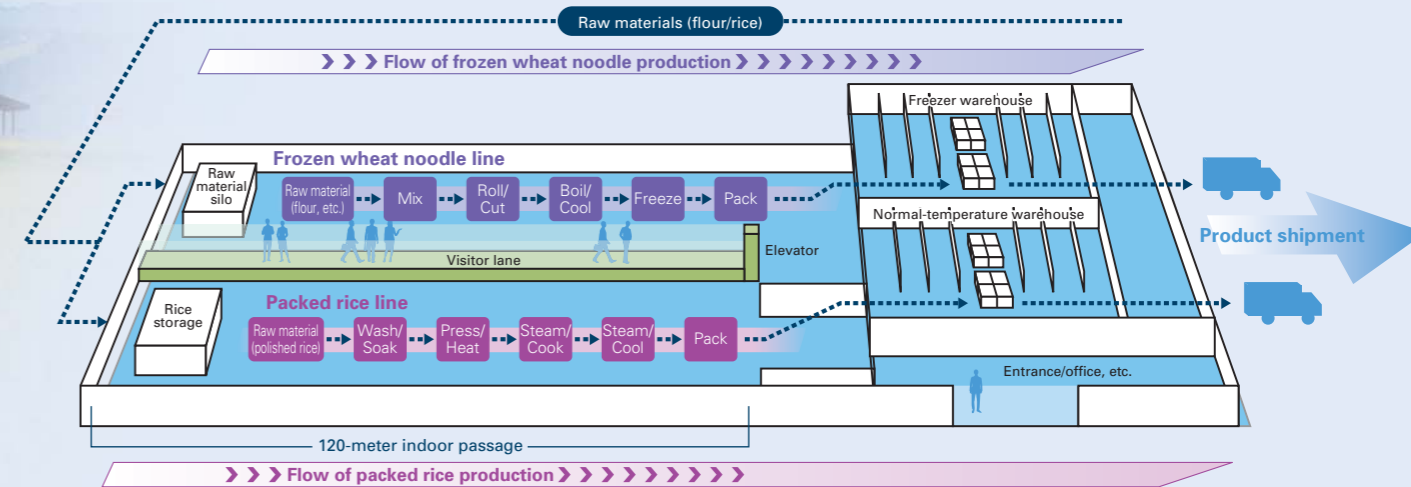
X-ray inspection device to detect foreign objects: All images are stored so as to enable a follow-up investigation when necessary.



Controlling the activity of workers by using different floor colors to indicate different levels of sanitary protection.



Rigorous security system controls access using ID cards.



ing, more than 50 proposals are presented. Proposals are adopted as necessary after screening. By increasing workers' awareness, the factory ensures high standards of safety and quality.

Making an Open and Friendly Factory

Visitors can take a first-hand look at the process of producing wheat noodle and packed rice products through a glass partition on both sides along a barrier-free visitor lane that runs in parallel with the production line. As the visitor lane is segregated from the production line, visitors do not need to wear masks or other protective gear. The visitor lane epitomizes one of the factory's goals — an open and friendly factory. Visitors have praised the visitor lane for giving the full picture of the production process and admire the uniquely long, straight production line. We welcome as many visitors as possible to better acquaint consumers with our products.

Located in a prime water source area that is also known as a prominent rice-producing region, the Uonuma Mizunosato Factory will make efforts to further enhance product quality and safety management and foster a friendly relationship with local residents and consumers while taking advantage of the benefits of the rich natural environment.



Bright 120-meter visitor lane runs in parallel with the production line.



Panels and video displays to show the production process.

Towards Harmonious Relationship with Local Residents

Involved in the construction of this factory right from the start, I tried to achieve the best in every aspect of the design of facilities and equipment by taking advantage of the know-how that TableMark has accumulated.

All the same, however advanced the equipment and machinery may be, workers are the most critical element. Fortunately, workers at this factory generally have a high level of motivation. They have a strong sense of responsibility to improve the factory by speaking their minds, all the more because of the small size of the factory's workforce. I believe that this will enhance product quality and safety.

At the completion ceremony of the factory, we received words of congratulation and encouragement from local residents. Whenever I recall that scene, I'm reminded responsibility to meet their high expectations.

Meanwhile, after the Great East Japan Earthquake, we supported disaster victims by providing cooked wheat noodles through an on-site meal preparation program and donating relief goods from among our products. The Uonuma Mizunosato Factory is a major production center of our mainstay food products, such as frozen wheat noodles and packed rice, which are also useful for disaster relief. We will strive to ensure that this factory and eventually, our company continue to meet the needs of society while fostering a friendly relationship with communities.



Kiyoshi Yoshioka
General Manager, Uonuma Mizunosato Factory