

*Rebuilding America  
with smart automation*



**...the Workhorse of Industry**

**Smart Automation Newsletter**

**March, 2011**

## Case Study:

# Fortville Feeders solves Conagra Foods cap feeding issue

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Conagra Foods had long been struggling with two cap feeding systems for its Reddi Whip canning lines. The existing systems required caps to be fed into a small, hopper elevator on the first floor; transported to and oriented in a centrifugal bowl on a second floor mezzanine; and dropped back down a gravity track into the first floor capper machine. Unfortunately, all three of these systems consistently jammed. To address the jamming issue, one operator's job was to climb the mezzanine with a special tool to un-jam and "baby sit" both systems. Another operator's job was to carefully meter parts into the small, hopper elevators to minimize the risk of jamming. The part feeding systems created a great deal of costly downtime, the addition of unwarranted labor costs, and annoying quality issues.

Mark Bostrom, Conagra's Manager of Continuous Improvement – aka fire fighter extraordinaire – was asked to resolve the issue. Mark contacted Fortville Feeders and presented the problem to their experts. After reviewing the existing systems, Fortville's conclusion was that the concept of the existing feeding systems – which had been produced by a competitor – was fundamentally and inherently flawed. Mark requested Fortville to help identify a solution that resolved the inherent issues and that could be seamlessly plugged into the existing production lines.

Collaborating together, Fortville and Bostrom's solution was a large capacity, high speed vibratory bowl - cleverly packaged on the first floor with a height adjustable air track that fed directly into the capping machine. The vibratory bowl eliminated the inherent jamming issue of the centrifugal bowl. The feeder bowl's larger volume eliminated the need for a hopper elevator and the associated part handling issues. The first floor location allowed a single operator to support all machines – eliminating the need to continuously climb the mezzanine. The solution clearly reflected Fortville's fundamental design approach to start with a solid concept that comprehends and addresses inherent issues, as well as, the ability to collaborate effectively with a customer.

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Case Study continued on next page.



## Case Study (continued):

### Fortville Feeders solves Conagra Foods cap feeding issue

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Conagra was encouraged by the proposed solution and contracted Fortville for the job – which included creating a functional duplicate of Conagra’s production capping star wheel. The objective was to fully validate performance of the actual interface between the bowl and capping machine – allowing for minimal downtime during installation of the new systems.

Conagra and Fortville met frequently to understand the requirements and expectations of the new systems. The requirements meetings included the operators of the existing systems – allowing them to understand and influence project direction. Several in-plant visits were required to assure seamless integration of the system into the existing line.

Once requirements and concept direction was set, Fortville proceeded with the final design and fabrication of the system. As the feeder bowls were tooled, Fortville’s builders understood the importance of delivering a jam-free system – which was the primary driver for the project. After months of design, build, refinement, and validation, Fortville completed a system run-off at its facility that delighted the Conagra team who had worked closely alongside the Fortville team.

The feeding systems have now been installed by Fortville’s technicians into Conagra’s plant. Although the project involved replacing existing equipment, Mark Bostrom is pleased with the Fortville part feeding systems. “Fortville analyzed our problem; identified an inherently advantaged solution; and worked closely with our team to deliver a world-class piece of equipment. Our operators are thrilled by the improvement and amazed by the ability of the system to run jam-free. Fortville is truly an expert in part feeding. I would strongly recommend them to anyone with a challenging part feeding problem”.

Fortville thanks Conagra for their confidence, support, and business – and looks forward to working together again in the future. Fortville also looks forward to similar challenges and opportunities with other customers to demonstrate how Fortville’s Smart Automation approach makes winners.

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## Product Highlight:

### Conagra High Speed Vibratory Feeder and Air Track

**Application:** Feeder bowl and air track for a continuous motion capping machine for Conagra's Reddi Whip product ; 2 systems provided (see write-up).

**Feed Rate:** 350 PPM – single lane output

#### Fortville Products:

- 36" CW and CCW Vibratory Bowls
- 14' Air Track with 90 degree corner and adjustable height compliance.
- Raised base and stairs for clearances in customer plant.



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## Product Highlight (continued):

### Conagra High Speed Vibratory Feeder and Air Track



Large feeder volume allows system to support production without an additional hopper – minimizes plant footprint and reduces maintenance.



## Company News:

### Automation Associates joins Fortville Feeders Team

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Fortville Feeders is pleased to announce the addition of Automation Associates to the Fortville team. Automation Associates is among the top sales representative organizations on the east coast for manufacturing automation. They have a strong technical understanding of their products and the automation industry – and clearly fit Fortville’s business model in being “solution providers”.

Automation Associates will represent Fortville in eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, portions of Connecticut, and the New York city area as follows:

#### **PA Office: Eastern PA, NJ, MD**

- Miller Decou Tel: 804-731-9000  
mdecou@autoassoc.com
- Tom Duffy Tel: 215-855-8777  
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#### **CT Office: NYC; NJ; portions of CT**

- Peter Galloway Tel: 203-655-6466  
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- Ed Carlson Tel: 203-583-2095  
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Fortville’s proven business model is to develop and produce innovative part feeding systems from a central, world-class facility – and provide excellent local support to customers through a strong team of sales representatives. Together, we look forward to successfully serving new and existing customers with this right combination of industry expertise and local support ... that’s smart automation.

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Please contact us at [ffi@fortvillefeeders.com](mailto:ffi@fortvillefeeders.com) to learn more.



# Products and Services:

## Part Feeder Systems:

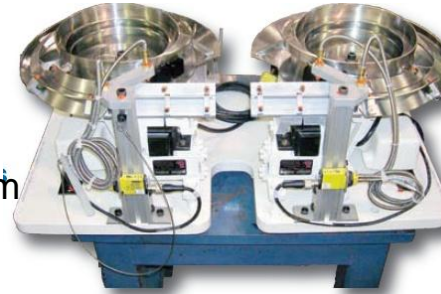


- **Vibratory Bowls:**
  - 6" to 70" in dia.
  - Feed rates to 600 pph
- **Centrifugal Bowls**

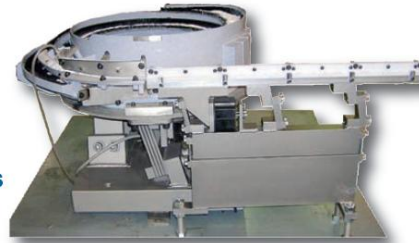
Fortville is the recognized industry leader in large, high-speed vibratory feeder bowls. Challenge us with your part.

- System design and development
- System build and validation
- System remanufacture & rework
- On-site service and support
- Service part sales

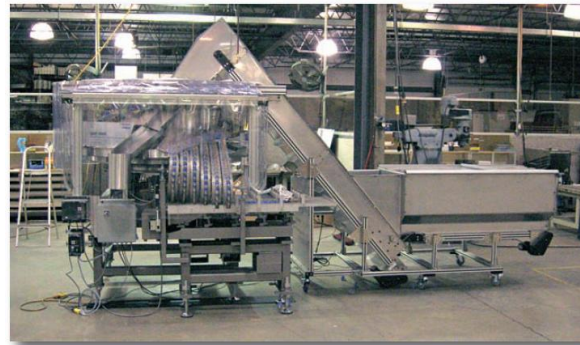
## Material Handling Systems:



- **Track Feeding Systems:**
  - 6" to as long as required
  - In-line Vibratory Tracks
  - In-line Air Tracks
  - Conveyor Belt Tracks
  - Gravity Tracks



- **Automation Mechanisms:**
  - Isolation Escapements
  - Shuttle mechanisms
  - Sensor integration:
    - Vision and weight



- **Storage/ Transport Systems:**
  - Elevators and Gondolas
  - Bulk Storage Hoppers
  - Sound Enclosures

See: [www.fortvillefeeders.com](http://www.fortvillefeeders.com)

## Contact Information:

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- Jason Crouse – Service/ Operations

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