

MEAT&POULTRY

CBW Exclusive: Cargill invests \$1 billion in fresh meats

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by Steve Kay (Cattle Buyers Weekly)

WICHITA, KAS. — Cargill Meat Solutions has spent more than \$1 billion in the last 10 years on its fresh meats business. That includes expenditures on eight beef processing plants in the U.S. and Canada and on two U.S. pork processing plants. Part of that money has gone into a new ground beef wing at its Dodge City, Kas., fed cattle plant.

The new addition is a 24,000-square-foot space that is able to produce 500,000 lbs of ground beef per day. Cargill is the nation's largest ground beef processor. CBW estimates it has capacity to produce about 5 million lbs of ground beef per day at nine plants across the U.S. Part of Cargill's \$1 billion investment was for advanced technology to make processing ground beef at the Dodge plant more of a science, said Dan Schnitker, CMS vice-president and general manager of the plant.

The new addition provides more flexibility in production, allowing CMS to better meet the needs of its customers, CMS said. The lean-point accuracy of the end product is more precise because of advanced technology and more sophisticated electronic monitoring systems. All operations are monitored and controlled by computer in an elevated viewing room. This improves productivity by eliminating the need to make manual adjustments in the lean-to-fat ratio of batches, the company said.

A computer-generated formula monitors lean-to-fat ratios within each ground beef batch. Should a batch stray from its specific ratio, the formula automatically corrects the ratio to bring it back to its correct lean-fat percentages. Each ground beef machine is connected to a computer. Monitors display the real-time status of each piece of equipment for employees to observe. Workers may pinpoint where attention is needed should something out of the ordinary occur. This reduces downtime and increases productivity, CMS said.

Steve Kay is editor and publisher of Petaluma, Calif.-based Cattle Buyers Weekly.