



Success Story: Healthy Pet

Pet Product Manufacturer uses Lean Tools to Increase Communication and Prepare for Expansion

Healthy Pet, a manufacturer of natural fiber pet products including litter and bedding, opened their first plant in the United States nearly 25 years ago in Ferndale, Washington. In 2004, the company opened a second location in Jesup, Georgia to better serve their east coast customers, build redundancy, and develop pulp fiber relationships with Georgia mills.

The company takes a holistic approach to pet care, creating products that are natural, sustainable and healthier for pets and households. The 100+ person facility in Jesup repurposes excess pulp from local paper mills to make bedding for small animal habitats and specialty cat litter. This process keeps that matter from being wasted or ending up in landfills, streams, or ponds. Healthy Pet often collaborates with local mills to advance their green initiatives, thus building on the strength of our local industry and its ability to improve the environment in a commercially viable manner.



Since beginning their work with the GaMEP, Healthy Pet has:

- Brainstormed 38 improvement ideas during the Value Stream Mapping Process, strategically narrowing down and prioritizing seven ideas based on strategic feasibility factors.
- Built a 15-month project map for improvement
- Identified \$1 Million in cost savings opportunities, including adjustments to chemical usage, visual scheduling, standard work documents, and sample multi-utilization.
- Prepared their employees and processes for successful expansion and automation projects totaling, \$9.3 Million in investment.
- Joined GaMEP Advanced Manufacturing Consortium to continue their Lean journey and to benchmark with other companies in the Coastal Georgia area.

»» Situation

In 2013, Healthy Pet was acquired by J. Rettenmaier & Söhne Group, a global natural fiber processing company that is closely held and managed by the Rettenmaier family in Germany. This acquisition allowed for additional growth in the European market, where Healthy Pet had begun to build a presence, with Jesup manufactured products and for German engineered wood substrates to be introduced into the USA marketplace via the Ports of Savannah and Charleston. These growth initiatives meant that it was time to expand their Jesup facility, which currently operates 24-hours per day, 7 days per week.

In 2017, the Healthy Pet team began preparing their company for change and expansion. From the start, the company has prioritized its "Best in Class" culture of Safety & Sustainability. To help them do this, Jimmy Welch, Head of East Coast Operations, contacted Ben Cheeks, Coastal Georgia Region Manager at the Georgia Manufacturing Extension Partnership (GaMEP) at Georgia Tech.

»» Solution

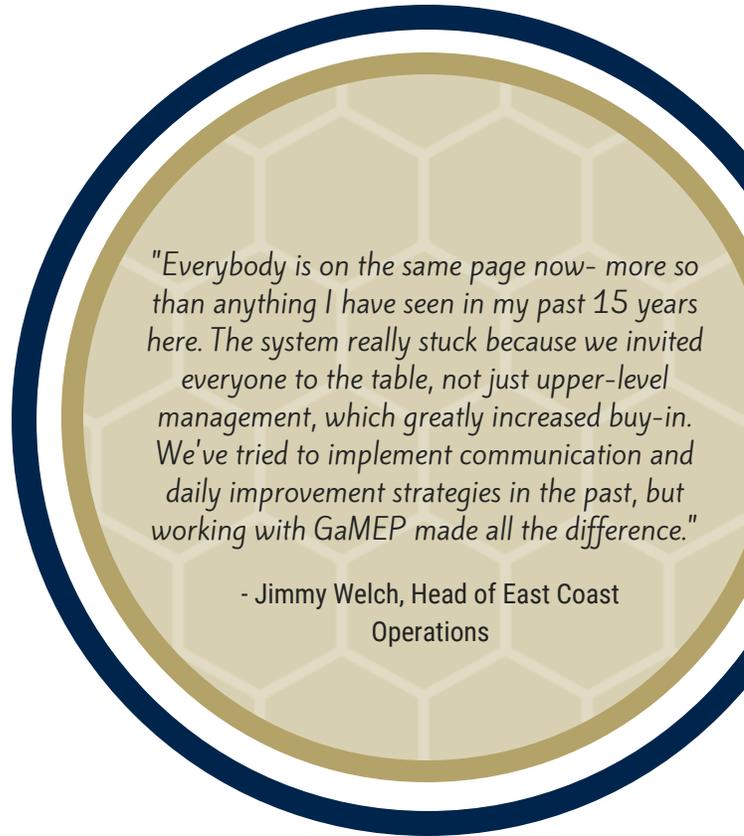
Cheeks introduced the company to Charity Stevens, GaMEP project manager, who met with Welch to discuss the needs of the company.

Welch was interested in starting a Lean program at Healthy Pet. Stevens recommended starting with a Value Stream Mapping event involving a cross-functional team that could evaluate the existing processes in place at Healthy Pet. Then, they could use that information to help them decide which direction to take to begin their Lean journey and create a roadmap for success with their expansion project.

Welch said, "The Value Stream Map helped us look at things differently. We found bottlenecks in communication and created a much more efficient plan for sharing information. The returns on this effort were immediate."

Stevens then worked with the team to implement a Management for Daily Improvement (MDI) system utilizing GEMBA boards and daily walks to improve communication and solve problems quickly.

In addition, the Value Stream Map helped them identify opportunities for cost savings and a need for additional supervisor training. Stevens has continued working with the company to provide training modules every few months for supervisors and managers on topics such as accountability, time management, and communication strategies for a multi-generational workforce.



"Everybody is on the same page now- more so than anything I have seen in my past 15 years here. The system really stuck because we invited everyone to the table, not just upper-level management, which greatly increased buy-in. We've tried to implement communication and daily improvement strategies in the past, but working with GaMEP made all the difference."

- Jimmy Welch, Head of East Coast Operations

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