

Now you're cooking with gas!

► **Poultry processor increases production 30- 40% with in-line cooker powered by gas-fired steam generators.**

Willow Tree Farm is fast becoming a national player in prepared fresh and frozen poultry food products. Started in the late 1800s as a small chicken farm that delivered eggs to the community, today the Attleboro, MA, firm focuses on premium poultry pies and deli-fresh chicken and turkey salads. The pre-packaged products are sold in supermarkets along the East Coast and are also available online and at the company's original retail store in Attleboro.

Family-owned Willow Tree Farm has always been willing to change and grow with the times. When the farm owner, the Cekala family, shifted focus from eggs and broilers to processing poultry for its pies and salads, it became a regional success. Today, mid-Atlantic poultry suppliers ship in eight to ten tons of chicken breast

each day to produce Willow Tree Farm's ever-growing line of products.

However, Owner and President Wally Cekala knew that change was afoot. The small facility, which employed about 110 workers, was already cramped with its numerous and cumbersome gas-fired kettle cookers, which cooked a finite number of chicken products at one time. A space-efficient inline cooker would take up much less room and cook the chickens and turkeys continuously through a conveyor system.

Cekala selected the ContinuumTherm by Blentech Corp., a continuous cooking system that can be adapted to cook pasta, bacon bits, meat pizza topping, rice, seafood, fruit, diced meat and vegetables. It is capable of steam cooking, blanching, stir-frying and sautéing.

But the steam-powered cooking method required converting to a steam boiler system. With absolutely no experience in boilers, Cekala did his homework. He looked to Clayton Industries after other area manufacturers recommended the boiler supplier.

Clayton representatives reviewed Willow Tree Farm's needs and helped design a compact boiler room that accommodates two gas-fired, 40 bhp (boiler horsepower) steam generators, as well as a condensate return and makeup tank, water softener and blowdown tank. (A single bhp is equal to boiler thermal output of 33,475 BTU/h or 9.8095 kW.) To get Willow Tree employees up to the task, Clayton representatives started up the new boiler room and provided operator training so that workers could obtain their boiler licenses. Today, the boiler supplier provides Willow Tree Farm with feed water treatment services and periodic preventative maintenance.

"Since the installation of the new cooking line, Willow Tree Farm has been able to increase its production by 30 to 40 percent, with no increase in plant size," Cekala said. The inline cookers process the poultry more quickly and efficiently. That, Cekala says, leads to fresher, tastier cooked chicken and poultry, and greater quantity and better quality pies and salads. ♦



► John Elliott, Clayton regional manager (left), and Walter Cekala, Willow Tree Farm's president (right), discuss the operation of the new steam generation system. Source: Clayton Industries.

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