Managing Split Operations

Joey Smyser (00:11):

114 bins here, 20 of which are designated solely to organic.

Lynn Clarkson (00:15):

My company is not strictly organic. We have an organic segment and we have a conventional segment.

Debbie Byrne (00:23):

We are both conventional and organic.

Bob Wills (00:27):

Organic cheese gets a gold label and it has on it the USDA bug.

Lynn Clarkson (00:33):

We're not in a business of telling people that they're not using their resources in the right way. It's our business to learn their values and to try to support those values responsibly. But there's conventional markets and there's organic markets and we like all of those.

Chad Olson (01:04):

I got a date, a check mark, and an initial, so. Yeah, so an important part of our organic system plan is listing the methods that we use to avoid commingling. And commingling means not mixing conventional and organics.

Kaylee Pickering (01:20):

Learning things like organic has to be processed first in the day. You know, you have to keep it separated, and labeled properly, and you really have to follow the process through the entire building to make sure everything's accounted for. So, it adds a lot of responsibility to your employees to make sure to keep it all separate.

Justin Fugate (01:39):

If I'm making sausage, there's a lot more traceability that organic customers tend to want. They want 100% traceback.

Jill Brockman-Cummings (01:47):

In the first years we did mill transitional grains as well as organic. We had to keep very good records as far as what was the clean out, where's the documentation for that? And then when we went back to organic, you purged the system to make sure that there was absolutely no remnants of transitional grain in there. Document, document, document a million times. <laugh> If you ever wonder if you should write something down, write it down.

Griffin Berger (02:33):

Welcome to our juice room. This is where we're making juice, surprisingly enough. And we're only either doing an organic product or we're only doing conventional product. We're never running two productions at the same time. We're not making an organic apple juice and a conventional apple juice. Sometimes we are processing organic products in the juice room and simultaneously we are processing conventional peppers or mushrooms here in the dry room. So we have to keep those activities separate. We have separate logs for each of the rooms for each of the different productions that may be going on. And we have separate lab coats and gloves and hairnet stations so that we can avoid any cross-contact, cross-contamination.

Chad Olson (03:12):

And so within our control, how we can avoid the commingling is keeping the pallets separate. We keep, try to keep them in different pallet rackings. And certainly we never put conventional coffee on top of organics in case there's a bag leak. Always conventional on the bottom, organics on top.

Presley Bracken (03:31):

This is the conventional, which means it's not organic. And then this is the organic coffee.

Zach Dowd (03:38):

We don't have any zones that are dedicated to organic products, but we have the flexibility of our space to make sure that we at least keep it above nonorganic product. It allows us to reduce the risk of anything contaminating our organic product, dripping or dropping.

Anders Gurda (03:55):

Because gravity.

Zach Dowd (03:56):

Because gravity, man. Things fall down.

Joey Smyser (04:08):

So to identify organic, you have to label it. It's all about labeling. And so it's either color coding, which we use green for organic or labeling "organic only." So our bins outside are all labeled "organic only" for the 20 that we designate for organic. Nothing touches them besides our organic soybeans.

Chad Olson (04:24):

When the organic coffee is put away, it needs to be labeled. We'll put a nice big marks that you can see from across the room.

Zach Dowd (04:33):

Because it's organic, we'll throw a green sticker on to each of the pallets. So this whole pallet is this SKU here.

Debbie Byrne (04:43):

Down and dirty. We have place cards, placards, magnets that we put on the tanks so that they know if it's organic or conventional.

Bob Wills (04:53):

This is where we've got the magnetic stickers that go on the thing. So in addition to the production records, we also have a very easy visual record of what the status is. So that one's got the regular milk in it right now. This one's got organic milk.

Chad Olson (05:08):

We try to identify all of our storage vessels by blue for organic and gray for conventional.

Presley Bracken (05:16):

And from here to over here is all organic. So all of the blue bins are roasted organic coffee. And the gray bins are conventional.

Kaylee Pickering (05:28):

Our biggest thing is anything that's organic gets a green tag or sticker. If you have a buggy of packaged meat, yes, the labels say organic, but we still put in a green organic tag. Green just relates to organic in our world. <laugh> We see something green and we know immediately to switch gears to organic handling. And that sense that you get when you see the term organic, it's like, okay, this is the only thing I'm going to focus on. This is all I have to do right now.

Justin Fugate (06:00):

Then one other trick I use when I'm doing pepperoni or summer sausage, I use only green loops for any organic sausage. So then anybody that's looking at any of these smoke trucks anywhere out throughout the process can see those green loops and then they automatically know it's organic. So this would be for like a conventional summer sausage. And then if I were doing organic, that's what I'd switch out and put these green ones in.

Chad Olson (06:30):

We'll always try to roast in a batch. So if we're going to do organics, we'll do all the organics. If we have to do conventionals, we'll do all those, then do the organics.

Kaylee Pickering (06:37):

When a customer wants to bring an animal to us that is organic, they have to be the first animal in. That animal is the first butchered and cut during the day. So we have no possible way of any cross-contamination.

Justin Fugate (06:52):

Then we don't have to clean anything because everything's already clean. And we can go from organic to nonorganic, but you cannot go from nonorganic to organic without totally cleaning everything. The same way we treat our slaughter and our raw processing, we tend to do all our organic stuff first and eliminate any need for that clean out to save time and money and then we all obviously have less paperwork to fill out too.

Debbie Byrne (07:23):

Most of what we do on the make room floor is cleaning. Clean, sanitize, clean, and sanitize. The vats, the lines, everything. And then we must document it.

Bob Wills (07:33):

Yeah, so this is a wash record and it'll show either a truck or a tank. B2 is a tank that was locked earlier.

Debbie Byrne (07:41):

So I think a lot of what organic asks you to do and to track fall right in line with the rest of your food safety because you have to do it anyway.

Griffin Berger (07:52):

When we're done with conventional and we want to do the organic, we have to clean every single tray, cart, liner. We'll use a soap and then we'll pressure wash. Then we will sanitize the trays and liners. And then the final step we will also do, which is not required, but we just like to go above and beyond, is we'll turn the whole dryer on and let it heat up to 155 degrees to really bake and cook all these little areas that you might not be able to see and find. So we are really separated from any contamination or food safety issues. After a day of grinding, we'll come along with a vacuum cleaner, just a shop vac that we have in our janitor's closet, and we'll vacuum up all the big powder chunks. All we do is we flip this back and we, you know, use, we spray it out with a garden hose, which we have a water drop.

Griffin Berger (08:43):

We spray it all out and we get all these cogs nice and clean. And then the last thing we'll do once we have all the goo and everything cleaned up and we've inspected around all the different little turnbuckles and points, then we'll sanitize these food contact surfaces. That's the critical area that actually needs to get the sanitizer.

Chad Olson (09:03):

As a split operation, we have some unique responsibilities to take care of our cleaning and commingling. And so with permission, we're able to use some of the same equipment for conventional and organic, but they have to go through a rigorous purging, or a cleaning. So parts of the roaster are accessible for cleaning in between conventional and organic coffees. There's the picking cart. So before that skill cart is filled, they'll wipe it down with the alcohol. And we have a log for that, so that's checked off. And then the cooling tray, which is the large stirring arm that you see,

that's accessible. So that is also wiped down and checked off. And so those steps are done prior to the organic roast going into the machine.

Presley Bracken (09:51):

Okay. Every single time I do organic, this is my cleaning log, and I write the date and then I write that I cleaned the pick cart, wiped it down, cleaned it, vacuumed it, and then I initial it. So this matches my roast log here. So every single date on here, I can look back at my dates here and see that I did an org roast and that they match and that's all that is. Our cleaning substance that we use successfully is isopropyl alcohol. And we like it because it does not require an afterwash or what they call a potable water rinse. If we were to use a quat sanitizer or a bleach type sanitizer, we would need to rinse with it. And this is for the food contact areas.

Lynn Clarkson (10:39):

It was inconvenient to clean out conveyors or transition spots. So we went back and we made all the transitions more convenient for people to look at, convenient for folks to clean out, and monitor. And that's really all it took. All it takes is to be secure in taking something from here and moving it through bins, handling, drying, screening, other things, and deliver it here, unmixed with anything else.

Joey Smyser (11:07):

So you have to complete at least a 10-pound purge to change it over to organic. But we tend to go over that to be about 10 bushel, 15 bushel because we have such a large system here and we want to verify that we've cleaned the system out properly. Yeah, we're doing roughly 60 times more on the purging just to make sure we got our system cleaned out.

Chad Olson (11:25):

When we grind coffee, we can clean it before the organics or we can clean it and purge it. We have a coffee that we purchase that is 100% organic. It's our French roast coffee. We sell that coffee because it's a good source, a good price as conventional and organic. And so we're able to have a unique purge so the organic coffee has gone through the burrs, sold as a conventional coffee, which we have a market for. And then next comes the organic coffee. And so when that happens, we have a log and we note the date and the time, and we purge this coffee for this coffee and that's it.

Kyle Arave (12:09):

Yeah, so we usually load in an organic coffee before we go and proceed with doing the rest of the organic coffees just to cover the machine within the inside with the oils of an organic coffee and then just proceed that way with the rest of them.

Griffin Berger (12:33):

So whether it's an organic or conventional product, we will process it here. The cleanup is the same, the setup is the same. There's no special logs or forms that I need to fill out because our cleaning procedures are the same.

Kaylee Pickering (12:45):

So we basically just run it as if we were producing 100% organic, that keeps everything the same. We're not having to change between chemicals or systems.

Debbie Byrne (12:56):

When I came in, we were still using treated salt for conventional cheeses and untreated salt for organic, to which I said no. <laugh> So I changed it so now we use untreated salt for everything. We use the same enzyme. Everything in our plant is approved for organic, so I can use it on conventional and organic, so that keeps it simple. That's the goal, keep it simple, not contaminate. So the only difference between our conventional and organic is the conventional milk.

Kaylee Pickering (13:36):

It's definitely a culture shock when people aren't used to those kinds of regulations. They don't understand that being that it is organic, that you have to keep it separate throughout its entire process. So we're constantly giving them tools and resources to help them segregate everything in their process. And in the morning, we'll kind of tell everybody like, "Hey, this is our plan." Whether it's an organic animal or we're making that organic sausage for the day, that's known right away in the morning, so they're not second guessing or we're going back and forth on something. We just make it known and everybody's on the same page throughout the day.

Joey Smyser (14:14):

So we do annual and biannual trainings. And so we have to go through and verify that each employee knows the amount to purge, when to purge, and what to purge. And so once we go through that and we can verify that the employees know that, then we know we're good. And then they have to be trained on all the documentation to be able to sign off that they've completed those purges.

Chad Olson (14:36):

Sanitation and commingling has been one of our great challenges. And it's a welcome challenge. By having a split operation, you need to make sure you're able to follow compliance without burdening your staff. If you make it easier to do and clearer, it will be done.