

Littau Harvester among company's product offerings

By Gary Pullano
Assistant Editor

A pair of Holland, Michigan, equipment suppliers is introducing products to strengthen their market presence in the blueberry industry.

Spring Brook Supply has become a distributor for the Littau ORXL Blueberry Harvester.

Based in Stayton, Oregon, Littau Harvester chose to work with the Michigan outlet to provide a more direct pipeline to its machine, which is popular in the Northwest.

"We've been out to Washington and Oregon and seen the harvester in action," said Dave Velkema, Spring Brook's president and co-owner with his brother, Dan.

"With BEI (International) going out of business, (the Littau owners) were excited and agreed it would be a perfect time for them to come into the Michigan market," Velkema said. "With the need in the blueberry world right now for harvesters, and being in Michigan and having known many of the blueberry growers with other businesses we've been in, it looked like a pretty good opportunity."

Spring Brook and Littau representatives hosted blueberry growers at a West Olive, Michigan, farm in mid-October to view the harvester.

"Littau is a new name," Velkema said. "What they're really known for is the fresh market, having also harvested raspberries and blackberries with them. It has a little bit different head on the machine to be able to do this."

"When BEI closed, there definitely was a need for a harvester here – that's why we started talking to Littau. They make

a really good harvester for fresh market. With the labor shortages, more and more growers are looking to own a harvester because they can't get laborers. This does a very good job with fresh. That's where the industry is going right now.

"It sounds like it's going to be a real good partnership between us and (Littau)," he said. "They agreed it would be a good venture."

According to its specifications, the ORXL Harvester has a 210-square-foot working platform. Its elevator has over 72 square feet of storage area. It can store and lower four pallets (6,000 pounds) of fruit. It has only three conveyor drop points for fresh fruit. It has a 56-inch-wide unobstructed tunnel width.

It is a diesel-powered machine that straddles a berry bush to harvest its fruit. The driver and work crew are on top of the machine as it shakes the bush; only the ripe fruit falls into the catcher plates and into a series of belts that transport the fruit to berry crates after being cleaned by air fans that remove unwanted leaves and debris.

"It's all about the drops and how it handles the fruit," Velkema said. "Their patented conveyor system requires very little fruit transfer, reducing the number of drops."

"We just got our first machine and a lot of growers are asking about it," Velkema said in preparation for the October tour. "Littau has just never gone into this area before."

Lakewood has new offerings

The Econo Air Cleaner Inspection Conveyor is Lakewood Process Machinery's newest addition to the company's lower-cost "Econo" line of berry packing equipment.



Photo: Lakewood Process Machinery

Lakewood Process Machinery is marketing its new Econo Air Cleaner Inspection Conveyor.

According to a news release, the Holland, Michigan-based company's Econo Blower was being used at a blueberry grower's facility in Washington earlier this year. The 30-inch-wide combo unit is essentially a stripped-down version of the company's popular high-capacity blueberry air cleaners, offering smaller growers the benefit of purchasing a well-built piece of blueberry packing equipment that yields great results without unnecessary added costs.

The machine is well built, removes debris without any issues, is extremely easy to clean and spreads fruit evenly across the entire width of the machine, making both the debris removal and inspection processes easy and effective, according to Lakewood.

The air cleaner section of the machine gently removes and collects leaves, loose dirt and debris from blueberries coming in from the field, and then spreads the berries onto the inspection conveyor section, making manual inspection of the fruit as hands-free as possible for any fruit other than what needs to be removed from the line by the inspecting personnel, according to the company.

Lakewood Process Machinery also

is marketing its new fill-by-weight clamshell filler for blueberries. The 12-head weigh-filling clamshell filler, the EZ Fill, is a stripped-down version of the company's previous weigh-fillers with a simplified user interface, minimized drop heights and a new dribble-gate system. It is designed specifically for an increased level of accuracy in container weights with blueberries, and has an improved weigh-bucket apparatus for quicker unloading and faster production rates.

Along with the machine's blueberry-specific features, the EZ Fill includes Lakewood's patent-pending Wedge Wheel Clamshell Denester, guaranteeing fewer doubles when denesting. It also includes three dump funnel cartridges, allowing for the packing of different-sized clamshells, or punnets, without the use of secondary transport conveyors, making the container changeover process tool user-friendly, according to the company.

The EZ Fill is designed to fill any hinged clamshell, or punnet, from 4.4 ounces up to 4 pounds, and will fit a wide variety of container footprints, according to Lakewood. **FGM**

Spring Brook Supply proudly introduces the Littau ORXL Blueberry Harvester



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