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GEA Launches Changeover Assist to Reduce Errors and Downtime in Food Packaging

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The digital assistant was developed primarily at GEAâ??s production site in Biedenkopf-Wallau (Germany), the companyâ??s center of excellence for horizontal packaging machines

GEA is introducing Changeover Assist, a new digital application that provides standardized support for product and recipe changeovers on SmartControl-based machines. The software guides operators step by step through the changeover process, helping reduce operator errors, product waste and unplanned downtime.

The digital assistant was developed primarily at GEA's production site in Biedenkopf-Wallau (Germany), the company's center of excellence for horizontal packaging machines. The software is initially available for GEA PowerPak thermoformers and the GEA MaxiFormer drum former, with a phased rollout to additional machines, including the GEA OptiSlicer, planned. Going forward, GEA also intends to consolidate the slicing and loading systems portfolio of its Food Solutions business unit in Biedenkopf-Wallau. This will help reduce interfaces and better align future development work for individual machines as well as integrated line solutions.

For many food manufacturers and packaging operations, product and format changeovers are among the most demanding steps in industrial production. High employee turnover, the use of seasonal labor and growing product variety add further complexity. Every deviation, such as using the wrong packaging materials or skipping individual changeover steps, can result in waste, rework, quality deviations or production interruptions.

Changeover Assist addresses these challenges with digital, recipe-based operator guidance directly on the SmartControl HMI. The application displays only the steps relevant to the specific product changeover, supports multiple languages and can be enhanced with images, videos and additional work instructions. Each completed step is confirmed and documented, increasing transparency, traceability and process reliability throughout the changeover. The machine can only restart once all required steps have been properly confirmed.

"With Changeover Assist, we make valuable machine and process knowledge available at all times, which helps our customers carry out changeovers safely and efficiently, regardless of individual experience levels," says Michel Theiss, Product Manager Digital Solutions at GEA. "The result is fewer operator errors, less material and food waste, faster onboarding of new employees and greater overall production reliability."