

Food safety culture key at Trouw's Highland plant

**Feed Facility of the Year:
Premix Category Winner**

By SARAH MUIRHEAD

THE Trouw Nutrition plant in Highland, Ill., is the 2018 Premix Category winner of the American Feed Industry Assn./Feedstuffs Feed Facility of the Year award.

As a supplier to the companion animal sector, Trouw's Highland plant operates under a food safety culture. "We have to be that way. One mistake, and we can sink a whole brand," plant manager Monty Barker stated.

The Highland plant has been manufacturing vitamin, mineral and base premixes for more than 35 years. This plant has been focused on and dedicated to companion animals since 2005.

The facility has a wide range of blending and packaging capabilities, with unique processes that allow for the handling of fine free-flowing ingredients as well as those with sticky flow characteristics. In order to maintain the quality of the mixes, the plant's manufacturing area is climate controlled. Calibration and verification processes are also performed on all weighing devices.

"The pet food industry is a very confidential and competitive business that requires more layers of validation and testing to ensure we are producing a quality product," Barker stated. "We have to make it baby food safe."

The workforce at the plant includes 29 full-time employees. They manufacture a wide range of blends that are custom formulated by in-house nutritionists.

To drive home Trouw's "food safety culture," every employee participates in regular safety training. Production employees must complete the company's universal training program, which is designed for cross-training employees in all phases of the production process. These trainings are then logged in a training matrix. Monthly safety committee meetings are also held to review and instill this culture.

With access to more than 500 ingredients, Trouw provides custom formulation to companion animal customers. The facility handles mixes that range from fine-powdered ingredients to dry whole fruit and vegetable-type products containing peas, carrots, apples, sweet potatoes, pumpkin and more. The company's complete focus is on helping customers solve specific problems in



health, nutrition and manufacturing.

All ingredient quality reviews at the plant begin with the collection of documents. From there, five risk assessments are completed for each raw material, including: food safety, sustainability, physical characteristics, nutritional parameters and health, safety and environmental impact.

Barker explained that ingredient specifications are created based on identified nutritional requirements and identified risks. A product quality agreement (PQA) is created and sent to each supplier and/or manufacturer. The PQA contains the specifications both the customer and Trouw expect the ingredient to meet. Undesired substances, such as heavy metals, pesticides and other parameters, are also addressed in the PQA.

"All ingredients coming into the Highland plant are near-infrared spectroscopy analyzed and compared against a discriminant analysis fingerprint," Barker said. Testing is designed specifically to an ingredient and the risks associated with that ingredient. Other testing is performed on the basis of customer requests.

Barker explained, "Suppliers and manufacturers are assessed according to global and local quality standards. Items included in the evaluation are quality, risks and hazards, social responsibility and past third-party audits."

Tracking and tracing systems are actively used from the receipt of ingredients through the shipment of finished products. "We are fully compliant with being able to trace our materials one step forward and one step

back," Barker said.

A business continuity plan is in place to mitigate the supply disruption risks during emergent situations. The system is tested annually with a "mock recall." This is in place to prepare the team for adverse events, and tabletop mock crisis situations are practiced. Additionally, a rapid alert system is in place to notify plant personnel when there has been an incident in the world that rises to the level of notification. When a notification occurs, "we take immediate action, if warranted," Barker elaborated.

All Trouw facilities, including the one in Highland, are audited against a rigor-



The team at Trouw Nutrition in Highland, Ill., manages an inventory of more than 500 distinct ingredients used in the companion animal formulas produced at the Highland plant. Monty Barker is manager at the plant.

ous internal and external third-party quality audit scheme to ensure that prerequisite programs and quality procedures are in alignment with local, state and federal legislation guidelines, customer and company expectations and industry best practices.

A key performance indicator (KPI) board on site in the Highland breakroom shows kilos produced per person per hour per production location. Energy usage and waste per ton also are posted. Barker explained that “the KPIs are discussed with plant employees as well as the management team,” and the results “help fuel improvements to operations.”

Trouw is committed to its employees and having a high-performing culture in the workplace. To support and encourage company values through its staff members, Trouw put together local “Culture Champions” to fulfill their values of innovation, collaboration, capable and caring.

Being a place that has a strong culture is important to Trouw. The local champions are responsible for putting together company events that support and encourage cultural development. “These actions include team building, community service events, personal development programs and events to nurture our team to build innovation and collaboration,” Barker explained.

“Trouw also has a hazard recognition program that encourages employee engagement on operational improvements. This program allows employees to make

comments and recommendations on safety concerns, food safety hazards and efficiency,” Barker said.

Trouw is also dedicated to continually improving its facilities. In regard to capital improvements, Trouw recently improved the camera system’s capabilities at the Highland plant. “We use this camera system to investigate safety and quality incidents and as a training tool for employees,” Barker said.

Trouw said it was excited to win this award again this year. In 2016, Trouw Nutrition’s Neosho, Mo., plant won the Premix Category and also was the overall facility winner that year. Both of Trouw’s pet food plants strive for top quality for their customers.

Since 1994, Trouw Nutrition has been part of Nutreco, one of world’s largest feed companies. ■



The Trouw Nutrition plant in Highland, Ill., is the 2018 Premix Category winner of the American Feed Industry Assn./Feedstuffs Feed Facility of the Year award. The plant is 100% focused on and dedicated to companion animals.