

STORAGE

BRANSTON'S WARM FRONT

AFTER a full year of tests Branston has given the thumbs up to a new Crop Systems' installation at the company's factory in Somerset. The original WarmStor (a low energy system for the automatic warming of prepacking potatoes) was commissioned five years ago at Manor Fresh at Holbeach in Lincolnshire, where it was reported to have produced 'outstanding' results.

Having reviewed the operation of an existing system at Ilminster, Branston ordered a new warming store which had to be operational in time to handle the 2013 new potato crop. The brief included four main priorities: low energy use, a reduced carbon footprint, low labour input and minimal crop damage.

Crop Systems came up with a specification which incorporated new technical advances and was designed to optimise the warming area within an existing structure. The result was a 1224-tonne conditioning store with 17 warming bays.

'All aspects of the design and installation went without a hitch and the Crop Systems team was entirely self-sufficient, allowing our day-to-day grading and packing operations to continue unhindered,' recalls Ian Wait, general manager at Branston.

'With the store ready in May we were able to immediately take the benefit from conditioning off-the-field new potatoes and we were able to reduce curing time for rot prevention down from 5-6 weeks to just five days, with all the benefits that brings. We are now coming to the end of the first season using our WarmStor to



Ian Wait in Branston's new crop warming facility in Somerset.

condition potatoes out of cold store. In the main, we've used a four day cycle and have seen a significant improvement in the way crops have handled through our packhouse – the consistent temperature achieved throughout every load has been key.

'We've also been impressed by the simplicity of the system,' says Mr Wait. 'Our WarmStor is run by our goods-in forklift truck drivers where the only intervention required is putting a probe into the first box loaded into the store which, in a busy operation like ours, has made its introduction so effective.'

WarmStor uses 'low-grade' heat from ambient air which is mixed and humidified to the required temperature using the building's main air distribution system. Branston's installa-

tion includes four 'Guardian Angel' refrigeration units, each one effectively operating as a fully contained system. Together they are able to provide 120kW of cooling or 170kW of heat as required.

Guardian Angel is said to be environmentally friendly because it has a very small natural refrigerant charge with a low GWP (Global Warming Potential) and zero ODP (Ozone Depletion Potential). It also has the ability to recycle heat which would normally be rejected by conventional refrigeration units. Automatic speed control optimises airflow to match the variable requirements of a constantly changing store atmosphere, while still maintaining crop turgidity and virtually eliminating problems caused by thumbnail cracking.

Choose the fully integrated potato handling package.



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Tel: 01353 740 666 sales@davidharrisons.com

Fax: 01353 741370 www.davidharrisons.com