ShireSystem

Sundown Products gains in production confidence by building asset insights with ShireSystem CMMS

Summary: Sundown Products Limited is an acclaimed UK manufacturer of cattle feed, horse and poultry bedding based in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire. It has a 40-year history and loyal customers, even holding a Royal Warrant for its sweet-smelling horse bedding, as well as generating more than 200 tonnes per day of cattle feed pellets.

Its production facility must operate without fail 24/7/365 to supply a constant customer demand. It has chosen ShireSystem CMMS from Elecosoft to help it institute planned preventative maintenance and manage its production systems better.

Sundown Products is a well-established manufacturer serving farmers and other customers with a range of products including high-quality cattle feed, horse and poultry bedding.

Its 3-acre production facility in Huntingdon operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, turning straw into Nutritionally Improved Straw (NIS) bovine feed, smart bedding for poultry farming, and sweet-smelling horse bedding which received a Royal Warrant in 2002.

It has always been committed to continuous investment and improvement. As part of this, MD David Cubitt decided that planned preventative maintenance was a smart investment and decided to install ShireSystem Computerised Maintenance Management Software (CMMS) to support its manufacturing process.

Chief Engineer Mark Robertson is now leading this initiative and explained to us how the software is being used to help the company document and better manage its manufacturing. Over the course of the past year, he has actively worked with the software and towards continuous improvement and uptime, helping to drive a 30% increase in productivity.

"By collecting information over the course of a year I've gained a good idea of how long each consumable item lasts. Now ShireSystem will flag up every morning anything that is about to wear out and needs changing, and I have a list of tasks for the day."

Feeding the production process

The production plant operates continuously, taking in around 10 articulated lorries full of straw bales each day which then go through shredding and into two main production streams. One of these produces pellets, by cooking it to improve the digestibility and making it into a form which is easy to handle. The other line chops and de-dusts the straw, and the resulting bedding is treated with sweet-smelling eucalyptus oil before re-baling for equine use.

This continuous process carries some risks, as Mark explained: "We have a critical parts list of essential machinery and process stages. From start to finish, processing the material may depend on up to 50 different parts of machinery – from gear-boxes to chains, clutches and rotary valves, mixers and pressers, augers and sieves, to bucket elevators and silos. If at any point any one of those break down, the plant simply stops."

Relying on the continuous smooth operation of every single asset within the manufacturing plant is therefore business critical, as he added: "If the plant stops suddenly and the system is full it will solidify incredibly quickly. If that happens, we have to dig it all out by hand."

> "Being able to see from the software what I need to do over the next six months means I can plan a comprehensive budget of what everything is going to cost me. In the past, I had no idea because I didn't know what might go wrong, but now I can budget for critical spares, for consumables, and for my labour needs."

Growing production plant knowledge

To minimise the risk and cost of production downtime, ShireSystem software is being used to help Mark document every single equipment asset, part and consumable item on which the plant relies. He told us: "My aim is to list every single asset we have and put it onto the system. This is a mammoth task, but it's important because the plant is 25 years old and very busy, so its unsurprising that sometimes equipment goes wrong. But each incidence is a learning opportunity, as I get a better idea of our risks – we fix the problem, it is documented and put into the software."

Building the database has helped Mark start down the path to preventative maintenance management already: "By collecting information over the course of a year I've gained a good idea of how long each consumable item lasts. Now ShireSystem will flag up every morning anything that is about to wear out and needs changing, and I have a list of tasks for the day."

Once the information has been input once, it is there for reference – not only by Mark and the three engineers on shift in the plant, but for their successors in the future. "I want to leave here at some point in the future, safe in the knowledge that we have a good system in place, that someone can come in and easily take over," he said.

Better budgeting and visibility

The ability to see what is ahead in order to budget better for maintenance and manage the inventory of spares and consumables are further advantages. Mark recognised these, saying: "Being able to see from the software what I need to do over the next six months means I can plan a comprehensive budget of what everything is going to cost me. In the past, I had no idea because I didn't know what might go wrong, but now I can budget for critical spares, for consumables, and for my labour needs."

The value of forward visibility is becoming even greater as productivity improves. Productivity has grown from six tonnes per hour to eight tonnes per hour over the past year, but sustaining this relies on continuous, problem-free manufacturing.

Having more confidence in the system and its reduced risk of failure is unlocking some other cost benefits, as Mark outlined: "We've had to run at maximum to fulfil the products on the order book recently – but of course it all uses power. The pelleting plant uses the most electricity – it takes 700 amps per press – while the baling process uses a lot less power. With the increased confidence, we can now run the pellet plant at night, which means we pay half the price of electricity that we would during the day."

This growing confidence in trouble-free production is helping Sundown Products pursue its growth goals. It is also focused on innovations that will enable it to gain even greater utilisation from its existing production facilities. It has already brought to market a new poultry bedding solution which can be produced through the existing pelleting process, which de-odourises chicken droppings, and is selling by the tonne. It is now investing in introducing enhanced NIS feeds and bringing new products to market.

More information

For information on licensing terms and a quote to suit your needs, please call us on **+44 (0) 23 8022 4111** or email **shiresystem@elecosoft.com**