



rps

Dome concept solves packaging challenge



➤ The background

Ever since consumers developed a taste for fresh, raw, ready prepared whole chickens, producers and brand retailers alike have wrestled with the problems of on-shelf presentation.

The traditional method of packing was, and to a large extent still is, tray and over-wrap with a label. However, all stretch-wrap films relax and unravel after a few days, enabling the product's natural juices to seep out and leave an unsightly mess on retailers' shelves.

➤ The challenge

As product wastage increased to more than 15%, retailers and food manufacturers put their heads together to find a solution.

They tried a slightly different approach - shrinking the film rather than stretching it, by using specialist equipment. This process sorted out the leakage issue, but once again the plastic started to sag after only a few days on shelf, leaving product presentation looking worse for wear. The industry was no further on from the original packaging format, except of course the materials and machinery needed for this option were vastly more expensive.



Perhaps a new application of an old favourite was the answer. Tray sealing products are widely used in the industry, so a deep tray was developed to take a whole chicken. The market was convinced it had found the perfect answer: a leak-proof pack, good presentation, and a flat surface to apply the label. But far from flying off the shelves, consumers were turned off by the concept of whole chickens packed in a style normally associated with red meat joints. Sales plummeted and the industry reverted to the old formats.



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➤ The solution

Realising radical action was needed, RPS took up the challenge and began to think outside the box. What if, instead of a shallow tray with film wrapped over it, a tray was 'draped' over the bird and sealed with a flat piece of film. The 'chicken dome' concept was born.

The simple ideas are often the best. That is certainly true of the chicken dome, which is simply a deep draw tray that roughly follows the contours of the bird, but has flat sections strategically placed for automated production handling and label application. The dome would be placed upside down on the conveyor belt; the bird would be placed into the tray, again upside down, and the machine would seal a flat portion of film across the flange. On leaving the sealing machine, the bird would then be inverted the right way up and a label applied. The chicken would then sit flat on shelves and remain in pristine condition.

➤ The benefits

The dome offers clear benefits, killing two birds with one stone to solve both the leakage issue, and the problem of poor presentation. By lifting the lid on its dome concept, RPS also elevated the product well above an everyday commodity item.

But that's not the end of the story. The secret of our dome's runaway success is in the tray composition. The previous stretch and shrink-wrap films each had anti-fog properties to ensure product visibility. Previous attempts at deep trays were unlikely to succeed as they prohibited the use of such anti-fog agents. Until RPS had the innovative idea to treat the deep draw domes with an anti-fog agent, ensuring product visibility without compromising the integrity of the seal.

What's more, existing sealing equipment can easily be adapted to the dome process and the special sealing film, which provides an even longer shelf life.

➤ The winning package

The dome was inspired by necessity, but required the determination and vision of one company to make it work. As the project's linchpin, RPS pioneered a solution to an industry problem by bringing together tray designers and manufacturers, film extruders, marketing professionals, machine engineers, food processors and retailers. RPS continues to develop the dome concept, giving consumers further convenience and choice into the future.