

AMERICAN CRYSTAL SUGAR

Automates Sample Collection and Management-level Reporting with LABVANTAGE

Company Background



American Crystal Sugar Company, located in the Red River Valley that borders North Dakota and Minnesota, has five sugar processing sites and a research site for microbiology testing. Each year the combined sites process five billion pounds of sugar through extraction from sugar beets. The QA/QC laboratory is responsible for the sample processing and analysis for all sites.

Key Challenges

American Crystal utilized a homegrown system written in FoxPro that had been developed and installed in each of the laboratories. Over time, each location had customized a unique solution without regard to a standardized approach to quality management reporting. The collection of quality data therefore became a very complex task when corporate management required consolidated reporting results from various laboratories.

System Sought

The solution had to address the needs of each of the laboratories and had to be accomplished with a single common database. The system also needed to have the ability to automatically schedule the collection of samples at regular intervals. Seamless data collection from the process control instrumentation was extremely important, and the ability to interface to other databases was required. In addition, they required an easy-to-use reporting solution to support management's information sharing demands.

System Delivered

LABVANTAGE has been operational at American Crystal since September 2001. It operates in five manufacturing QA/QC laboratories with approximately 100 users, including the research facility. In the near future, American Crystal expects to implement LABVANTAGE at a newly acquired Montana facility. LABVANTAGE uses workflows for collecting samples, auditing the facility, changing sample status automatically as the samples are processed, and auto-emailing based on calendar dates. The system peaks at more than 7,000 samples per day for the combined six laboratories, with tests done for sugar purity, pH, alkalinities and Refractometric Dry Substance (RDS). The granulated sugar is tested for moisture, ash, color, sediment, visible specks and granulation.

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Looking to the Future

Laboratory management is able to make decisions quickly and confidently from the test data, which is displayed in a graphical, time-based format. Management also has found that they are now able to use LABVANTAGE for customer audits to keep track of outstanding audit issues and provide good feedback to the customers. This has greatly improved responsiveness and the ability to ensure that audits have documented corrective action plans.

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