

MONTANA CIDER COMPANY BOTTLES UP SUCCESS

ABOUT WESTERN CIDER. The Western Cider story began in 2012 when co-founder Michael Billingsley established an orchard in Stevensville, Montana. The orchard grew to 5,000 trees and 50 varieties of apples, leading to the establishment of the Western Cider Company in Missoula in 2017. The company prides itself on being one of the few cideries in the northwest that grows heirloom, cider apples. It also produces a constantly rotating selection of traditional and more unique varieties of hard cider (Whiskey Peach, anyone?). The 7,000-square-foot production facility in Missoula - a former tannery - includes a popular tasting room and riverside garden where the ciders are served on tap. Canned, bottled and kegged versions of the cider are now available at grocery stores, gourmet markets, bars, and restaurants throughout Montana.

THE CHALLENGE. In 2018, the demand for Western Cider products was growing, but efforts to increase production were hampered by long and labor-intensive canning and bottling processes. For example, the canning process occurred every six weeks, lasted four days, and relied on the availability of temporary labor. Any slowdowns led to delays in subsequent production steps, including fermentation and transfer to different tanks. Another bottleneck occurred during pasteurization, where the machinery could only process 24 cans per minute.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. MMEC Business Advisor Shane Cantrell worked with Western Cider and members of the Western Montana Manufacturing Partnership to recommend solutions for implementing in-line pasteurization for canning & bottling process and improving automation throughout the bottling operation. Western Cider purchased a new in-line pasteurizer, bottling machine, and labeler, and over the last year, the bottling process has been reduced from over a week down to one day. These improvements have resulted in the ability for Western Cider to accommodate a much higher level of orders for its products.

"Working with MMEC has been an incredible experience for us and has enabled our organization to continue our market growth and expansion. MMEC's assistance has helped us achieve our goal of increasing our production capacity and significant lead time reduction."

-Jon Clarenbach, Owner

RESULTS



\$1,179,000 in increased or retained sales



5 new or retained jobs



\$31,667 in cost savings



\$375,737 in new investment

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