

WAFFLE COOKIE COMPANY ADDS A DASH OF AUTOMATION TO
ITS RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

ABOUT CARAMEL COOKIE WAFFLES. For an authentic taste of the Netherlands - without traveling abroad - many Montanans head straight to [Caramel Cookie Waffles \(CCW\)](#) in Billings. For 40 years, the bakery and café have offered homemade soups, sandwiches, and traditional European treats, including a Dutch & "Stroopwafel," a chewy, crispy waffle cookie. Original owners Jan and Judy Boogman baked these delightful snacks in an oven from Holland and began packaging and selling them as "Caramel Cookie Waffles" to both retail and wholesale clients. Since the Boogmans retired a few years ago, three new owners have continued to expand production and introduce cookie waffles to a growing market of hungry customers. The team has grown to 14 employees, and the cookies are now sold throughout the state.

THE CHALLENGE. Preparing, baking, and packaging artisanal cookies has traditionally been a labor-intensive process. After new owners Lilly Corning Thompson, Erin Heringer, and Katie Edwards acquired the business two years ago, they wanted to maintain the old-world recipes and traditional baking methods while pursuing growth opportunities tied to increased demand. In addition, the original baking oven was no longer operational. They began exploring whether equipment upgrades - including the integration of automation - could help increase production capacity and use resources more effectively.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. Company leadership worked with the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center to develop an equipment proposal. Business Advisor Lane Gobbs prepared a return on investment (ROI) analysis to help the owners understand the potential costs and benefits over time. The ROI also helped CCW qualify for an [Automation Loan program offered by the Montana Department of Commerce](#), resulting in significant financing support. CCW purchased an automated carousel line that includes a new oven with an automatic dough piecer, an automatic dough depositor, and an automatic carameler, along with a cooling conveyor line.

MMEC has continued working with CCW on several follow-on projects to maximize the impact of the equipment implementation and enhance operations to support further growth. Food and Process Specialist Claude Smith led food safety training for staff and supported the development of a HACCP plan. Lane and Claude continue to provide guidance on equipment selection, facility layout plans, and production process improvements. Before the equipment upgrades, the company produced 1200 cookies per hour with five employees. When the automated carousel line is fully implemented, CCW expects to produce 4000 cookies per hour with two employees. In addition, material waste is expected to decrease by more than \$50 per batch, and per-cookie margins are estimated to increase by 5% per year.

RESULTS



\$2,410,000 in new investment



\$320,000 increased/retained sales



\$300,000 in cost savings



14 increased/retained jobs

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"Lane and Claude have been invaluable. They have provided very specific expertise—from an unbiased, non-competitive perspective—and have also helped us make additional industry connections. With Lane and Claude's help, we anticipate 5x our current business in the next three years. Thank you!"

-Lilly Corning, President