

## The secret of crispy tortilla chips

When buying tortilla chips, consumers expect delicious taste and that special "crack experience" with every bite. Moisture analysers from METTLER TOLEDO help Poco Loco keep this promise – every day.



Poco Loco, which is based in Roeselare, Belgium, is the market leader for tortilla chips and has become the number 1 private label manufacturer of TEX MEX FOOD in Continental Europe. It is certified according to the British Retail Consortium (BRC) "higher level" quality system for Food and the International Food Standard (IFS). For the routine quality control of its tortilla chips production the company has used METTLER TOLEDO moisture analysers for the last 10 years and is very satisfied with the instruments' performance – especially with the new generation based on halogen technology – and the reliable service.

### Moisture content determines "crack experience"

The moisture content determination of both the final tortilla chips and their raw materials, corn flour and flavours, is a frequently performed measurement in the quality control lab situated next to the six production lines. Mr Segært, the Quality Manager, explained that the texture and shelf life of tortilla chips depend on the right moisture content. Only the right moisture content guarantees the desired 'crack experience' for the customer over the entire shelf life of

8–10 months. Therefore, the correct value is crucial and is analysed at least every three hours to ensure that the production process runs at optimum levels. If out-of-specification results occur production is stopped immediately for troubleshooting. In the worst case product has to be scrapped. Mr Gentier, head of laboratory, points out: "If the chips are too wet you can not sell them because nobody wants to bite into wishy-washy chips. Our customers are only satisfied if they open the bag and find fresh crispy chips. To achieve this we need to keep the moisture content in a defined range."

### Nothing left to chance

Poco Loco uses three HB43 halogen moisture analysers. This model was selected because it is fast, easy to use, proven in production and it monitors the moisture content efficiently. The analysis process is straightforward: The chip samples are crushed in the original packaging in smallest possible pieces. Five gram samples are weighed into the sample pan. Then they are exposed to the standard drying program at a typical value of 100 °C with the switch-off criterion #3 which equals a mass change of 1 mg per 50s. The instrument automatically calculates the moisture content. The

analysis time of 5-7 minutes is short enough to quickly react to any changes or problems in production. All employees who work with the HB43 are very positive. Here are just a few of their comments:

"It's a robust and reliable instrument and very user friendly."

"The large key functions give direct access to the main functions which makes operation self-explanatory."

"If something goes where it shouldn't the flat surfaces and freely accessible sample chamber make cleaning very easy. Just brush down the pan and your are ready for the next measurement."

### Fast, reproducible results

Mr Segært is very pleased: "We've never had any serious problems with the dryers, we are very satisfied with the customer service and we work according to our certified quality managements systems. Furthermore, we recently replaced an old infrared dryer with the new, faster instrument based on halogen technology and could only benefit from it." Due to the precisely regulated halogen technology the target temperature is reached more rapidly which reduces analysis



time. In addition drying is homogeneous and gentle. Hence, sample burning can be reduced to a minimum and highly reproducible results are generated.

Mr Segært outlined Poco Loco's business success and future growth plans: "Next year we will expand our production facility. So also quality control will have more work." He added: "Maybe time for a new METTLER TOLEDO moisture analyser..."

"It's a robust and reliable instrument and very user friendly."

Bart Segært,  
Quality Manager



At the service of crispy tortilla chips: HB43 moisture analysers in the Poco Loco quality control laboratory.

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