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Florida MEP Gives Naples Supplement Maker a Boost

Vitarich Laboratories Implements Lean Manufacturing Techniques to Improve

Naples, FL - The nutritional industry is a \$150 billion a year market and for more than 13 years Vitarich Laboratories in Naples has been a pioneer in the research, development and worldwide distribution of premium nutritional products.

Last year Vitarich added to its stature within the industry by becoming one of only 60 facilities among the 7500 in its industry to achieve cGMP certification, an industry symbol for quality that has been instrumental in contributing to the company's rapid growth. With growth comes growing pains and as the company expanded, they continued to need more space, which resulted in Vitarich's operations being spread out among several buildings, creating workflow issues.

Craig Waldinger, Executive Vice President of Vitarich, recognized that the company needed to address the issues this type of fragmentation was causing and find a way to streamline their production processes. "Rather than going from point A to B, our product was being passed back and forth between buildings, traveling miles and delaying it getting out the door," said Waldinger.

Waldinger brought in the Florida Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Florida MEP), experts in manufacturing quality and efficiency to help.

As he has done many times in the past with other small Florida manufacturers, Dave Ferguson, a project manager with the Florida MEP, first worked with the company to obtain several grants to help offset the cost of the program. Next, Ferguson and his team introduced Vitarich to Lean Manufacturing, a technique that utilizes simple but effective methods to identify and reduce waste and inventories, clear shop floors and streamline production processes all with a goal of decreasing costs and increasing productivity.

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"We found they needed assistance in streamlining several areas, including shipping, production, packaging, so we used Lean techniques such as Value Stream Mapping to literally map the flow of work through the production line, identify gaps and then implement changes that would have the greatest impact," said Ferguson.

Ferguson and his team also oversaw a new physical plant layout that the Vitarich staff is finding much more efficient and helped make improvements on purchasing systems and inventory with equally positive results.

"One of the first results of Lean implementation was moving all of our powders into one building, centralizing everything from warehousing to manufacturing," said Waldinger. "Not only did this reduce production travel time, it helped us alleviate moisture problems due to exposure to Florida's humid climate and it's improved lead time which results in increased sales."

Vitarich also estimates Lean implementation has led to a 20 percent increase in productivity, and cost savings in excess of \$200,000 and expects to increase sales by over \$2,000,000 in the next year.

Ferguson and his team are now working with Vitarich to obtain additional grant funding for a new project to develop a Lean plant layout for a new facility and have helped the company get into a program to identify potential Government Contract Work.

The Florida MEP is an affiliate of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) under the U.S. Department of Commerce. The national MEP is a network of manufacturing extension centers that provide business and technical assistance to smaller manufacturers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Through MEP, manufacturers have access to more than 2000 manufacturing and business "coaches" whose job is to help firms make changes that lead to greater productivity, increased profits, and enhanced global competitiveness. For more information on the Florida MEP program call 321-939-4000.

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