

Excellent Consumer Feedback

When it comes to consumer feedback, Reichel has personal knowledge because he prints the company's web site on each package. Consumers who visit can click on his e-mail address to send their comments—and suggestions—directly to him.

For example, one satisfied respondent, who is obviously concerned about her children's health, writes, "I recently saw the apples and caramel Dippin' Stix and let me tell you, as a busy working mom of a 16-month-old and a very active 7-year-old, the snack was a



From left: Craig Reichel, Kristi Thaut, customer service for sales, Tom Weichmann, CFO.

"What a great idea!" Anyway, they are totally awesome and we are recommending them to everyone. The apples were fresh. The caramel was delicious and not too messy. And there was just enough of everything to be a quick afternoon snack without any leftover mess."

Once consumers learn about Dippin' Stix, some will go to great lengths to get them. One mother recently e-mailed Reichel and said, "My friend is a licensed daycare provider and feeds her children healthy breakfasts, lunches and afternoon snacks. She loves your apple and caramel snack and would love to offer this healthy, delicious quick snack to her children, but the problem is that she's having a very hard time finding it. Her poor husband has been to every store within 20 miles and has only found one store that carries it.

Excited Consumers

"Every time he goes there, they only have one package left! My friend is afraid that one day her husband won't return home because he is tired of looking for them. She would be sending you this, but does not have computer access. She wants to know is there a way she can buy a case of them? I think she likes them more than the kids. Her husband found one package, but the kids never saw it, as she ate it herself. The whole thing is rather comical because everyday there is a conversation concerning this snack. Please let me know if she could buy a case of these. Thank you and thanks for making such a healthy snack."

Health and nutrition are driving factors in consumer acceptance but flavor and quality are certainly prerequisites, according to

Reichel. The company processes and packs fresh produce under the same USDA standards that are required for the handling of meats and cheeses and the result is a safe, high quality product consumers can buy with confidence.

"We are a fully inspected USDA plant," he reports. "Our plant is extremely clean. We built this plant originally to be a USDA manufacturing plant. Our relationship with our USDA inspectors is very strong because we do everything by the book but I think their level of trust in what we do is very high because we constantly come to them and ask questions. We're very proactive. The USDA has had many people through here other than inspectors. We took an older plant and remodeled it and they've kind of used it as an example for some of their other inspectors to say we've done an excellent job. We have HACCP plans and procedures in place and we treat produce like it's a USDA-inspected product."

Proactive Food Safety

Producing high quality product is a continuing process of self-analysis and self-improvement, always carefully considering the comments and criticism of inspectors and even customers who send their own inspectors to audit the plant, according to Reichel.



Excellent shelf life means product can be shipped as far away as Seattle, Washington, and Vancouver, BC, or farther.

blessing. What an idea! My son would like it if you made the apple with chocolate since he likes chocolate. He thought he could still eat healthy and have the sweet at the same time. My local grocery store in Miami does not carry this line. I found your product in our local Super Wal-Mart . . . I'm particularly interested in the carrots and ranch dip and the peanut butter with bread . . . school is about to begin and it would be great to send snacks with them."

Another excited consumer e-mailed, "My friend and I just tried your apples with caramel and peanuts and we loved them. We bought them just because the packaging was so cute and we thought,



Cut-and-peeled carrots coming off the line at Reichel Foods, LLC.