

AGRI-FOOD COMPANY COMMITTED TO BEING THE BEST



Shadow board organized by shape and colour.



5S team completing step 1 (sort) of a 5S event.



Richardson Oilseed Limited is one of Canada's oldest and largest fully integrated crushing, refining, processing and packaging operations – Richardson was the first company in the world to market canola oil. The Richardson Oilseed plant in Lethbridge, Alberta packages a wide array of private label canola oil based products as well as the company's own Canola Harvest brand products for the retail, food service and industrial food production markets.



Small ideas improvement board.

Although the Lethbridge plant had been using lean concepts such as standard work and kanban systems for a number of years, it was in 2005 that the plant began in earnest to adopt lean thinking and incorporate lean concepts into daily operations.

The application of lean tools and concepts has generated positive results for the company: high-quality housekeeping; reduced changeover times on production lines; reduced damage to equipment, tools and parts; and lower finished inventory. Over the last 18 months finished goods inventory has been reduced by 50 per cent. Ultimately, lean work done in the past has increased efficiency, productivity and reduced costs.

However, the application of lean concepts and new ideas began to slow due to staff turnover, but the company's

commitment to excellence didn't falter. Today, Richardson Oilseed has kick-started a renewed emphasis on being the best that they can be. "We'd fallen back a bit because we had seen some turnover in employees that had received the training and knowledge in these tools," explains Shirley Gilmour, director, operations for Richardson's Nutrition Division. "I felt we needed to develop a higher level of skill and understanding in our staff."

With the support of Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD), Richardson Oilseed engaged a lean consultant to take 12 people from management and operations through an in-depth coaching program. The program offers up to 12 days of on-site coaching to get people using lean concepts and tools. Kari Petro, operations analyst, was one of the participants.

productivity improvement program, ARD also organizes out-of-province best practice missions. Gilmour highly recommends taking one. “It’s a fantastic opportunity. You’re able to see what others are doing and bring those ideas back. You don’t have to reinvent the wheel. You can steal with pride and implement those ideas quickly,” says Gilmour.



Parts carts to reduce change over time and equipment damage.

Although she had seen lean tools like shadow boards that visually show employees where tools belong, she didn’t understand the concepts or the lean philosophy.

“My knowledge was pretty limited,” she says. “The coaching program has shown me what we were doing and why we were doing it and made the whole process more clear as to where we are heading.”

As a result of the ARD productivity improvement coaching program, Richardson

Oilseed has increased its use of visual management—translating tasks, processes and information into visual symbols for faster communication.

“We had some things in place before—team boards, output levels on the production floor—but now we are looking at everything we do and asking ourselves how we can make it visual,” says Gilmour.

While the company uses lean to become more productive and profitable, it has also, like many agri-food processors,

come under increasing customer scrutiny when it comes to its environmental footprint. In 2011, Richardson Oilseed took part in a “lean & green” group sponsored by ARD and discovered that sustainability could really benefit the company.

After developing a green value stream map to prioritize activities, Richardson conducted both lighting and water audits. These projects resulted in savings and impacted the bottom line.

For more information visit: agriculture.alberta.ca/productivity

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Productivity Improvement is an initiative of Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development and supported by Growing Forward, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative.

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