

PROFILE

NAME: SunMed Growers
LOCATION: Warwick, Md..
FOUNDED: 2018
WEBSITE:
www.sunmedgrowers.com

CHALLENGE

Automate packaging operations to streamline the process of getting products packaged, labeled and out the door as quickly and efficiently as possible.

SOLUTION

Integrate a state-of-the-art print-and-apply labeling system with the Epson ColorWorks[®] on-demand color label printer and an Epson VT6L 6-Axis robot for printing high-quality color labels and applying them next-label out.

The Sun, Science and State-of-the-Art Technology

Maryland's largest medical cannabis grower uses the power of the sun, cutting-edge science and unique, state-of-the-art packaging technology to produce and deliver award-winning alternative medicine

What's a business to do with batches of misprinted, unusable labels? The answer for the SunMed Growers team was to create art from the unusable labels. Jordane Fairchild, post-harvest manager at SunMed Growers made the most of a stack of misprints, forming the unusable labels into a sculpture of a chicken instead of tossing the labels in the trash. The recycled chicken sculpture Fairchild crafted from unusable labels sits in her office, doubling as a whimsical decoration and a reminder of the businesses' former packaging process.

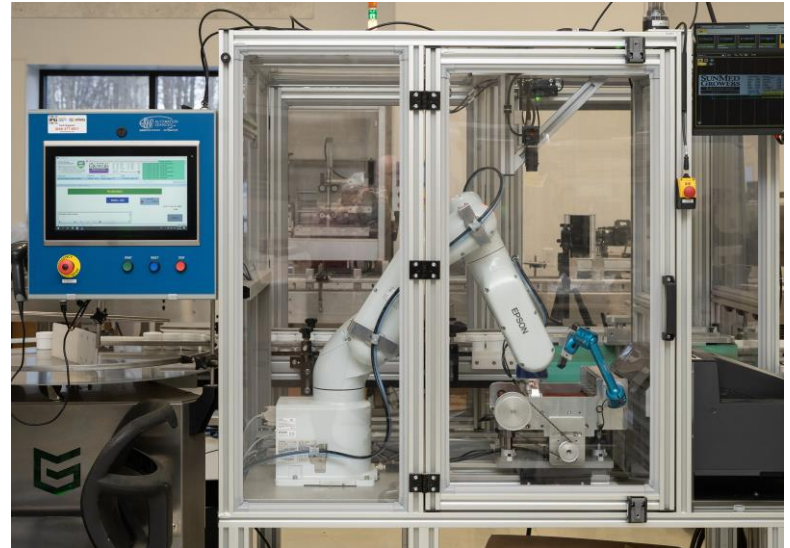
[SunMed Growers](#) is Maryland's largest medical cannabis grower. It prides itself in its award-winning, sun-grown medicine and has been recognized as the "Best Grower" in the Baltimore Sun's 2022 Best of Medical Marijuana edition.

The team at SunMed Growers keeps a keen eye on futureproof technologies that can holistically enrich its products, employees' work lives and business. With an eye on the future, SunMed Growers was looking to eliminate some of the manual tasks associated with packaging and automate operations to cut back on wasted time and materials. It needed a state-of-the-art packaging operation to mirror the technology implemented in its other departments, such as its world-class cultivation facility.

"We make sure our team has every tool they need to make the job as efficient and easy as possible," said Justin Garcia, compliance manager and PR manager at SunMed Growers.

To do that, the SunMed Growers team worked closely with the label printing experts at [Integrated Productivity Systems \(IPSi\)](#) to implement a custom print-and-apply labeling system featuring the Epson [ColorWorks](#) industrial, on-demand color label printer and the Epson [VT6L 6-Axis robot](#). The Epson system is a truly automated, flexible robotic print-and-apply solution for printing high-quality color labels next-label out.

"People tend to think automation is suited only for manufacturing environments with high volume and high labor costs because it is



out of reach for most businesses financially," said [Rick Schilling](#), owner of IPSi. "That is just not the case. The true benefit of automation is the ability to control processes, which is what SunMed was able to do by implementing the new system while also keeping cost in mind."

Cultivating Better Processes

For SunMed Growers, the post-harvest phase is more than 50% of the entire manufacturing process. When it comes to packaging its most popular products, SunMed Growers produces two to four batches per day with each batch size being around 2,000 to 3,000 labels.

"We had labeled an entire batch with incorrect labels before catching the error. Frequently, I would be worried that I accidentally sent labels with the wrong lot number. It was a nightmare," said Fairchild, recalling the company's previous packaging process.

"Before, we could run four batches by lunch-time, and it would take the rest of the day to label them. Now, when we run a batch, all are packaged, labeled and finished in one pass. It cut the amount of time we had to work in half."

- JORDANE FAIRCHILD, POST-HARVEST
MANAGER, SUNMED GROWERS

“Before we had the print-and-apply system, we printed the labels and had a team of six people manually apply the labels to the containers,” she continued.

“Now, the new print-and-apply labeling system fits and functions seamlessly in the SunMed Growers packaging line. Each product is delivered by the induction sealing station to the print-and-apply system, where each container’s corresponding label is printed on the ColorWorks [CW-C6500P](#) peel-and-present printer and picked up and applied by the Epson 6-Axis robot. There is now a one-to-one relationship between printing a label and applying it to a container.

The ColorWorks CW-C6500P was the ideal choice for the label printer used for the print-and-apply labeling system as it delivers on-demand, color labels up to 8-inches and is engineered specifically for fast, print-and-apply applications. It’s compatible with ZPL II, SAP® and built to integrate with existing workflows. The Epson VT6L complimented the ColorWorks printer as it is a full-featured, easy-to-use robot with an All-in-One design and built-in controller, saving valuable factory space. Its SlimLine structure features a compact wrist pitch that enables access to hard-to-reach areas in confined spaces. The VT6L delivered the high level of accuracy, consistency and flexibility required to streamline this process.

Eliminating the Strain

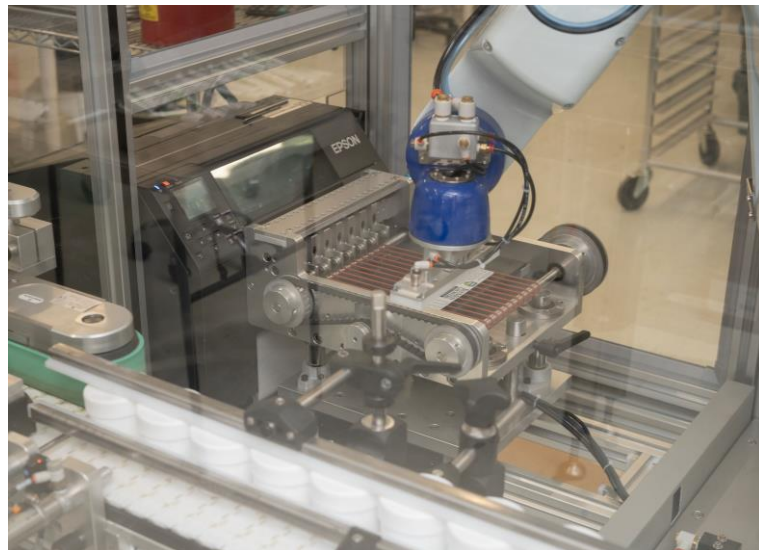
Fairchild mentioned that having the print-and-apply labeling system makes the entire labeling process much faster, and more efficient and uniform. “Before, we could run four batches by lunchtime, and it would take the rest of the day to label them. Now, when we run a batch, all are packaged, labeled and finished in one pass. It cut the amount of time we had to work in half,” said Fairchild.

She continued, “With the combination of automated packing and labeling, we are able to get our price point down and minimize the labor cost in production.”

Fairchild and her team no longer need to print labels in advance. Previously, the pre-printed labels were often obsolete before being applied and used by Fairchild and her team to make art in lieu of tossing them in the waste. Now that there is no longer a need for pre-printed labels, Fairchild and her team no longer have the amount of wasted labels to be able to use for art.

“All I have to worry about now is making sure I hit ‘send’ on the jobs. I don’t have to stay late in the evening to print labels so the team can get started on manually labeling the products when they get in the next morning. Plus, there are not near as many wasted labels. We do not have enough waste to create sculptures from misprinted labels anymore,” Fairchild noted.

“We were looking to become truly automated and streamline the process of getting our products packaged, labeled and out the door,” continued Fairchild.



“We succeeded in doing so. I’m confident in the marriage of our production and packaging now.”

Scaling with the Help of the Sun, Science and State-of-the-Art Technology

SunMed Growers is the result of generations of knowledge, growing experience and expertise and innovation. It is home to more than 150 employees and nearly 300,000 sq. ft. of facilities with state-of-the-art technology. Growth is a mindset at SunMed. That is why cutting-edge, yet scalable technologies are a must.

“It’s made a world of a difference when it comes to simply keeping up with business,” said Garcia. “If you’re going to have a lot of products coming out of the facility, then you need to have the technology to make it possible to push product out at that same scale of demand. So, with automation from our cupping line to packing line, and now our packaging line, we can very quickly and very efficiently get the product from our vault to dispensaries as quickly as we can grow it.”

The full video outlining SunMed Growers’ use of the print-and-apply labeling system can be viewed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnHLv98NLGQ>

A short video overview can be viewed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIGbhtvTjeo>

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- RICK SHILLING, OWNER, IPSi

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