

# Zoroco and Partake Foods: Partnership in Every Bite

How a family-run Idaho CM/CP and its fast-growing gluten-free cookie brand customer transformed their relationship through automation and a multihead weigher.

BY JOSEPH DERR, Editor

**C**aldwell, just outside of Boise, Idaho, is known for its wine trails and potato processing.

But what may not be well known is that it has become a hotspot for gluten-free cookies, thanks to a partnership between local contract manufacturer Zoroco Packaging and one of the biggest brands it supports, Partake Foods.

Founded in 2007, Zoroco Packaging is a family-run contract manufacturer and contract packager that built its reputation on its approach to problem-solving across sectors including frozen foods, gluten-free products, and allergen-free manufacturing.

"Zoroco is and has always been a very entrepreneurial company," says Chris Barker, COO of Zoroco Packaging. "We focus on integrity, transparency, and service while

working closely with our partners to find unique solutions that fuel growth."

With certifications like BRC and GFCO, Zoroco's commitment to quality is a vital part of its diversification strategy. "Many came to Zoroco because of our ability to deliver the highest quality products while maintaining such a diverse number of certifications," says Barker.

Zoroco's expertise spans three specialized plants totaling approximately 150,000 square feet in Caldwell. The Frozen Plant—their largest operation—runs virtually non-stop, packaging tater tots and French fries alongside sauces, meal bowls, and frozen fruit purées. The Gluten-Free Plant handles allergen-friendly dry goods, snacks, and baking mixes, while the FreeFrom facility maintains 100% certified gluten- and allergen-free products.

## A partnership formed

It was the FreeFrom plant—Zoroco's smallest operation by volume but now its most automated—that first grabbed the attention of Partake Foods. Zoroco had supported Partake through early growth using small rack ovens—manually intensive systems requiring individual tray handling. "Partake's been with us since they were only running one or two shifts a month," Barker recalled.

Then Partake's sales exploded in the gluten-free cookies market, as more and more colorful boxes ended up on store shelves in national retailers such as Target and Whole Foods.

"When we launched, we had a vision of bringing Partake to every table and lunchbox, but we couldn't have predicted the pace," says Ian Beert, vice president of operations at Partake Foods. "Growing from selling cookies out of the back of a car to a brand in over 15,000 retail doors within five years came with incredible operational demands."

The breaking point demanded industrial-scale production. "Partake came to us and said, 'We want to do something different,'" Barker says. "My owner is extremely entrepreneurial, so he said, 'What if we automated everything?' And that's what we did."

## The automated line

Beginning in 2023, Zoroco launched an 18-month installation that reimagined cookie production at the FreeFrom plant. The phased approach allowed operations to continue uninterrupted while upgrades were implemented across existing lines.

A large linear oven fed by automated depositors is capable of processing



The star of Zoroco's bagging operation is a combination weigher from High Tek.

thousand-pound batches of cookie dough. Baked cookies cool and then wind around a horseshoe-shaped accumulation conveyor before flowing into two distinct packaging streams.

The first stream handles cookie trays. Here, ten Delta-style robotic tray packers load cookies into 12-count semi-rigid trays. These are then wrapped and packed by automatic cartoners into retail-ready packages.

The second stream produces mini-bags destined for vending machines, cafeterias, and grab-and-go displays. In this system, cookies are diverted into stainless steel bins, then carried by bucket elevators to High Tek combination weighers. From there, they feed into a vertical form/fill/seal operation that fills small, single-serve mini-bags.

### Precision weighing

One of the stars of Zoroco's bagging line is the High Tek Model M16 multi-head scale. This 16-head combination weigher system ensures consistent portioning of 19-gram bags, each containing about seven cookies—precision that manual methods can't match at scale.

"The buckets are extremely accurate," said Barker. "Adding that scale increased our throughput by 30%."

The scale feeds baggers at over 120 bags per minute, maintaining minimal variation in final weights.

The design also helps preserve product quality. The scale's stainless



Zoroco's bagging operation feeds various Partake variety packs.

steel chutes are angled so cookies collide with each other rather than metal, reducing breakage. A vibratory hopper system gently guides cookies into buckets that feed the 16-head distribution mechanism.

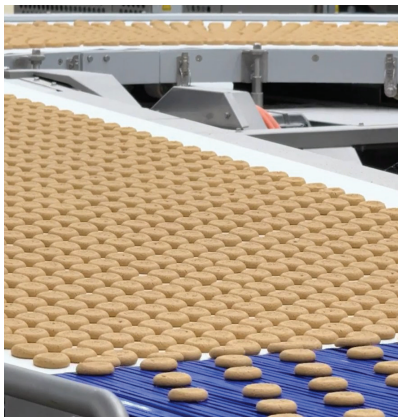
Two High Tek weighers support the bagging line, though typically only one runs at a time. The second weigher supports production of variety packs, combining bags of different cookie flavors into a carton.

Zoroco has partnered with High Tek for more than five years—a relationship that goes beyond equipment. "We pair High Tek scales with our machines that need to run the fastest speeds with the least amount of weight variability," Barker says.

### Values proposition

Zoroco's core values ("Committed and Accountable, Knowledgeable and Experienced, Customer Focused, and Do the Right Thing") have not gone unnoticed by their brand partner. When Partake needed a co-man that could move quickly, plan ahead, and deliver reliably, they found those qualities in Zoroco.

"They've been instrumental in helping us scale production without compromising on quality or values," says Beert. "Their reliability, flexibility, and proactive mindset have made them a true extension of our team." **CM+P**



Baked cookies wind around on an accumulation conveyor.

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