

## LB Foster completes top banana solution for Fyffes

Client Case Study



Fyffes plc is one of the largest tropical produce importers and distributors in Europe. The company has an annual turnover in excess of €1 billion. Although best known for its bananas (it sells 44m cases in Europe each year) Fyffes is also a major force in the pineapple and melon markets.

In the UK, Fyffes has four banana ripening and distribution centres – Basingstoke, Coventry, Livingston and Normanton, West Yorkshire. The Normanton DC is a new, 60,000 sq ft facility – a replacement for a smaller building located nearby in Wakefield which had served as a Fyffes production centre for over 25 years.

The £520,000 project to automate the Normanton facility was won by LB Foster Materials Handling of Leicester. The contract included the manufacture and installation of production lines and an accumulating pallet conveyor which is over 100m long.

*“We chose LB Foster because they had a better understanding of our brief – and that included the price. More than that they also demonstrated a willingness to understand what the job really entailed.”*

**George Kennedy**  
Operations Director, Fyffes

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 Bananas being loaded onto the accumulating pallet conveyor

 Pallets of bananas travel along the conveyor to the automatic turntable



### Picking the right materials handling partner

George Kennedy, Operations Director for Fyffes, was instrumental in selecting LB Foster for the Normanton project. He explains the rationale behind his decision, “We outgrew our Wakefield depot so we located to a new, bigger site to give us an increased production capacity of up to 50 per cent.

“We needed a safe and efficient way of transporting the pallets of bananas from the unloading bays around the edge of our large production area to the ripening rooms. There was also a requirement for six complete production lines to include belt and roller conveyors together with packing benches for up to 160 staff.

“Before we went out to tender, it was important to us that we spent considerable time putting together the specification of exactly what was required of the solution. This meant we could make an accurate like-for-like comparison once we received the proposals from the different companies.

“At the end of the day there were two clear front runners. We chose LB Foster because they had a better understanding of our brief - and that included the price. More than that they also demonstrated a willingness to understand what the job really entailed.”

### An efficient solution to process 70,000 bananas each week

Boxes of bananas from around the world arrive by lorry at Normanton on pallets. The bananas are green as they have been picked in a fully mature but unripened condition. The ripening process is suspended during the journey as the bananas are kept at a cool temperature of 13 degrees.

Inside the DC, the bananas begin their journey around the ripening and processing plant on the accumulating pallet conveyor. They are loaded by forklift truck and travel to an automatic turntable in the corner of the packaging area. This corrects the orientation of the pallets and they proceed directly to an offloading station adjacent to the ripening rooms.

Typically, the bananas spend five days ripening by which time they have taken on their familiar yellow hue. Next stop is one of the six production lines. Here operatives working at ergonomically designed packing benches carefully take the ripe fruit out of the boxes and carry out quality and grading checks.

Bananas which are deemed for any reason to fall short of the major retailers’ specification are separated out and placed on an upper level belt conveyor for sale in other markets. Those which pass the strict quality control procedure are repackaged ready for retail sale.

*“I’ve found them to be easy to work with – from the sales staff to the installation and controls engineers.”*

**George Kennedy**  
Operations Director  
Fyffes

**LB Foster**  
Materials Handling

Offloading the bananas in the ripening facility

Operatives work at ergonomically designed packing benches



Some bananas are bagged by weight and some by number of fruit, depending on the particular requirement of different retailers. The bags are then put back into boxes and placed onto a roller conveyor which runs down the centre of the packing benches. This conveyor takes the boxes of fruit straight to the loading bay to be palletized ready for despatch to the various supermarkets.

### Health and safety first for Fyffes

“Automating the movement of bananas with a pallet conveyor running around the production area has given us some financial benefits,” comments Kennedy, “but the main purpose of the solution was to ensure the health and safety of our staff working in that area – which it has done.

“The addition of the new production lines has been a significant investment for us and LB Foster Materials Handling have delivered the goods. I’ve found them to be easy to work with – from the sales staff to the installation and controls engineers. They have been in the industry for a long time so their experience shows and that’s a good fit with our business.”



Bananas undergo a strict quality control procedure

 The pallet conveyor is over 100m long

Leicester based LB Foster Materials Handling is a market-leading UK supplier and manufacturer of quality materials handling and storage systems. The company supplies equipment internationally including overhead conveyors, floor conveyors, garment conveyors and storage systems; it also has an in-house electrical controls design and build service enabling it to provide innovative solutions to all materials handling challenges.

LB Foster Materials Handling is a subdivision of its parent company LB Foster Rail Technologies UK Ltd (previously Portec Rail Products (UK) Ltd.) which is owned by the American multi-national, LB Foster.



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