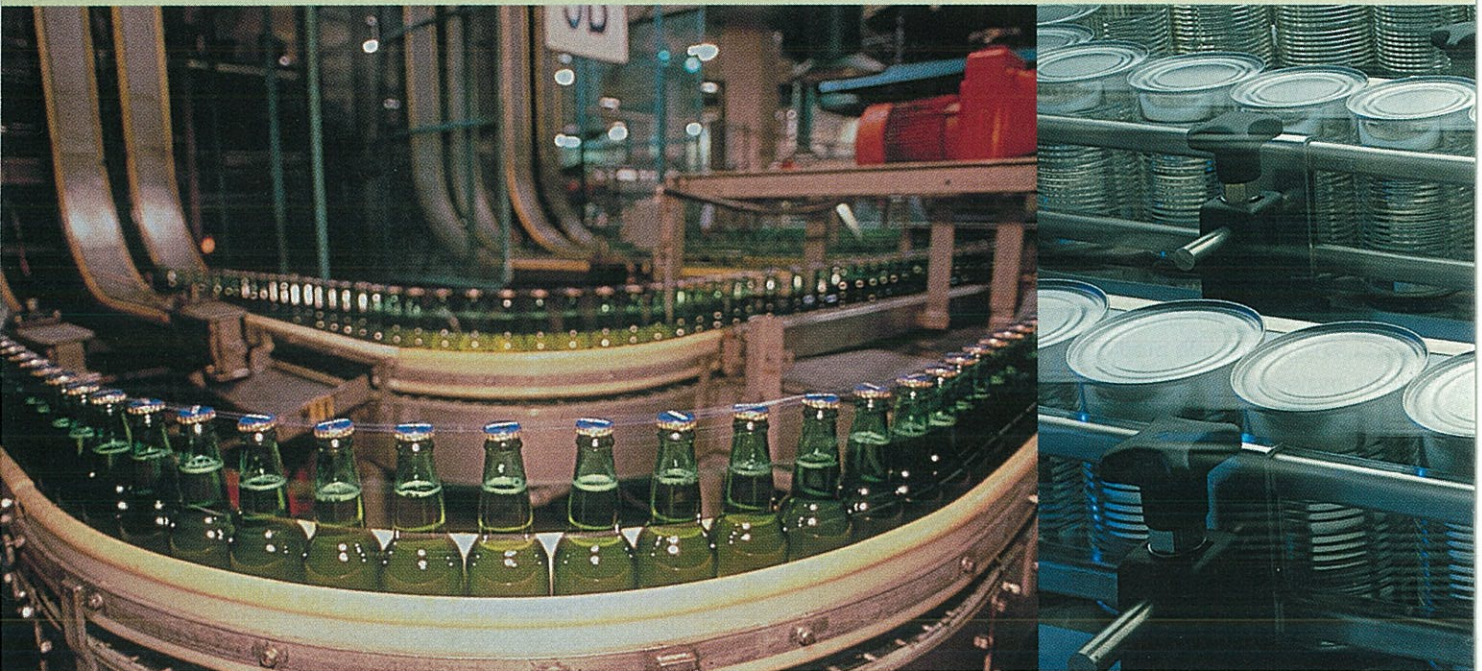


# TechnologyUpdate

## is the time right for

By Robert S. Seeley



**T**he food industry is renewing its interest in manufacturing execution systems (MES) as a result of new standards governing their performance and new priorities and practices on the plant floor.

Bill McCarthy, manager of industry solutions for supplier Rockwell Automation, believes MES is poised for a breakthrough in the food industry, a view shared by other industry watchers. "We're getting more calls from food users about MES, while ERP calls are quieting," observes Kara Romanow, senior analyst with Boston-based AMR Research, Inc. According to supplier CIMNET, Inc., Robesonia, Pa., a spurt in MES interest last year translated into a 200 percent increase in company sales.

McCarthy isn't surprised. He notes that larger food companies require more efficient plants as they reach out globally

and broaden their portfolios. Companies are also gravitating to made-to-order products, meaning shorter runs, quicker changeovers and "better management of recipes with an MES-type product," says CIMNET marketing director Ian Stone. The push to connect plant floor systems to company business systems is also a factor. "MES provides enterprise resource planning systems (ERP) with a window into the factory," according to Coleman Easterly, director of sales support with Green Bay, Wis.-based Mountain Systems, Inc.

As Intellution, Inc., Foxborough, Mass., describes it: "The need to share production data throughout the enterprise becomes critical."

### Many Definitions

Of course, it also helps that the definition of MES is becom-

Photo courtesy of Rockwell Automation

# MES?

Manufacturing execution systems are gaining momentum in the food industry, but some formidable hurdles still need to be cleared



ing clearer to food industry purchasers. The new ANSI standard SP95 identifies 11 MES functionalities agreed upon by vendors, consultants, and users, around which MES schemes are built. Functions include data acquisition/collection, process management, quality management, maintenance management, performance analysis, document control, product tracking and genealogy, and scheduling.

But ANSI SP95 still vies with other definitions, reflecting MES's different characteristics and capabilities, depending on the vendor. MESA International defines MES as "guiding, initiating, responding to, and reporting on plant activities as they occur."

SCADA (supervisory control and data acquisition), HMI (human-machine interface), and process and batch control system ("toolkit") vendors define MES at the next level. "MES typically has been implemented using a toolkit approach," says

AMR's Romanow, "but it needs lots of programming and time by expensive consultants to implement."

At still another level, Mountain Systems, specializing in food MES, offers a packaged, modular, configurable MES, Proficy for Manufacturing, which installs quickly, with minimal costly programming. Making a similar claim, CIMNET offers its INFOLINK MES based on the ISA S88 batch control system, allowing food companies to manage their recipes under the S88 model. INFOLINK allows a plant to integrate MES with its existing PLCs without redesigning its controls. "Our MES is compatible with any vendor's control system," Stone says.

The definition of MES also varies according to job function within the enterprise. For plant-floor personnel, the term could mean any application that helps perform a job more effectively. For business-level users, it may refer to applications that translate