Case Study:

Targeting net zero with grant funding support



Unisnacks is trailblazing a route to zero carbon warehouse operations with support from Central Bedfordshire and regional grant funding.

Unisnacks, a fast-growing importer and distributor of snacks, confectionery and beverages from Far East Asia, believe passionately in sustainable and ethical practices. From their base in Central Bedfordshire, they tirelessly explore and assess new technology and working practices that enable them to achieve their goal of net zero operations and the support available to help them achieve this.

Based in Biggleswade since 2020, Unisnacks is one of the UK's leading importers and distributors of snacks, confectionery and beverages from South, South - East and East Asia. They are also trailblazers in sustainable and ethical practices. Caring about their products, their people and the planet, is at the core of their business and drives all growth activity.

Since moving to Biggleswade, Unisnacks has grown its employee numbers from 19 to 57, increased turnover by 71 %, expanded its product range into frozen foods and embarked on a journey to achieve a net zero warehouse operation.

Prior to 2024, Unisnacks invested heavily in a variety of measures to improve the carbon footprint of its warehouse operations, including:

- Installation of photovoltaic (PV) solar panels generating approx 50% (54 KWP annual) of their annual requirement
- All sales fleet cars replaced with EV
- EV charging infrastructure installed on site (increased to 14 charge points in early 2024)
- Battery powered forklift trucks
- Grey wastewater capture and reuse
- Salary-sacrifice scheme for employees to purchase EV
- EV staff shuttle operating between the site and Biggleswade town centre

Unisnacks had a target to achieve net zero warehouse operations by 2028 and these measures had placed them well on the way to achieving that goal.



Case Study:

Targeting net zero with grant funding support

New product lines and growth

Plans were prepared for introduction of a new frozen product range, a step that would not only extend Unisnacks product lines but also help improve the UK's food security which requires increased cold storage capacity nationwide to support this. However, the development of a cold storage facility at Unisnacks would immediately increase their power requirements three-fold. The required investment to address this impact would push their net zero target back further and drive up the cost of introduction of this new product line.

Standard avenues for sourcing investment at that time presented higher than usual interest rates. The cost of investment for this business growth strategy could not stretch to the investment in solar panels, battery storage and systems integration required to maintain the project's net zero feasibility. This left Unisnacks with no clear way to progress this new product line without impacting their net zero target.

Funding support

Through introductions made by the Business Growth and Investment Team at Central Bedfordshire Council, Unisnacks were made aware of the Growth and Innovation Fund (GIF) promoted by the South Midlands Growth Hub. GIF grant funding offered up to 50% of capital investment to businesses looking to develop innovative new products, services or processes, and support decarbonisation ambitions to enhance business resilience.

This provided a perfect match for Unisnacks objectives and with support from a Growth Hub advisor, they were able to prepare a detailed application for just over £116,000 of funding to help finance total project costs of £232,000 resulting in a 50% intervention rate.

The application supported the development and installation of a sustainable cold storage facility and adoption of an optimised last mile delivery system.

To achieve these outcomes, the grant application requested support for the following actions:

- Extend the existing PV panel installation to double generation capacity to 110 KWP p/a
- Installation of battery storage (124Kwh) to better manage and use increased power generation from additional PVs
- To improve efficiencies of logistics operation, integration of IT based:
  - Warehouse Management System
  - Route Optimisation System (transport management)
  - Isothermal Container Telematics (frozen goods delivery containers)

Preparing the application was a steep learning curve for Unisnacks and required upwards of 70-man hours and advisor support from the Growth Hub, especially in understanding the financial modelling required by the grant fund for the project.

The application was submitted in June 2024 and confirmation of a successful bid and award of grant funding was confirmed in Aug 2024.



Case Study:

Targeting net zero with grant funding support

Project Implementation

Having received the good news of their successful grant application, Unisnacks wasted no time in getting the project started. They had until 31st March 2025 to complete all actions and expenditure, so timing was critical.

At the time of writing, the project had already:

- Completed installation of all PV panels
- Installed batteries
- Finalised integration of warehouse management and transport management systems, due for completion in March 2025

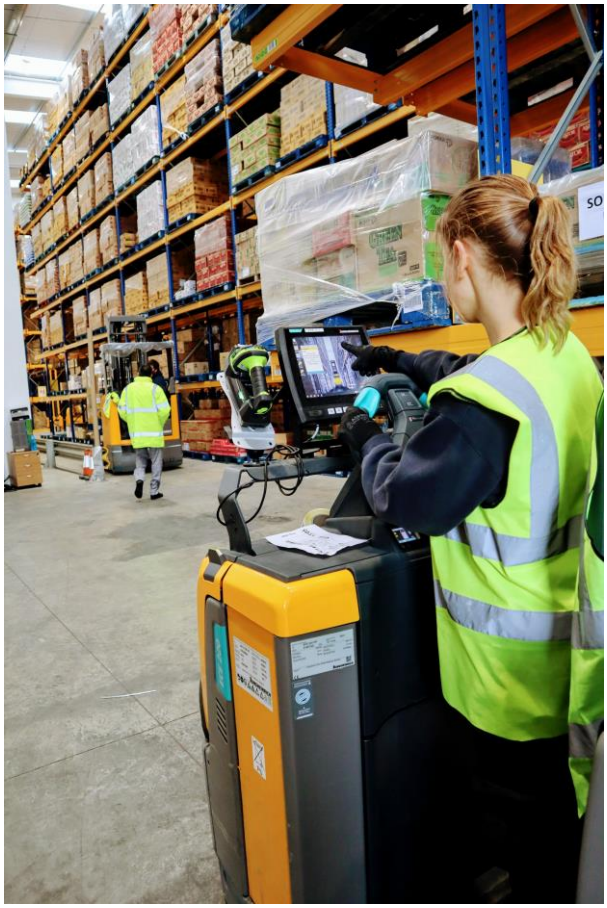
Although it is still early days, Unisnacks has already seen a 30% increase in power generation by the newly installed PV panels. Once the batteries are installed with monitoring software providing data on how that power is being used, Unisnacks will have a clearer understanding of how much closer they are to their net zero goal, but they are already sufficiently confident to bring that target forward from 2028 to 2026.

Unisnacks are in no doubt that the timing and value of this GIF grant funding has provided them with the means to progress their growth plans whilst maintaining their net zero targets. 94% of businesses in the cold storage industry, rely entirely on conventional energy sources. The ability to store and distribute frozen food with little to no additional impact on their carbon footprint has allowed Unisnacks to stay true to their ethos of caring about their products, their people and the planet.

The skills developed through this GIF application process, has left them well equipped to pursue other grant funding programmes in future and offer encouragement and advice to other SMEs in their local supply chain considering grant funding for other net zero actions.

Next steps for Unisnacks

The technology and equipment installed as a result of this grant funding, provides Unisnacks with a scalable framework to which they can add additional power generation for potential future needs, e.g. extending working hours to include an additional shift. The battery capacity will provide a platform to consider extending warehouse operations with little impact to their warehouse carbon footprint.



Case Study:

Targeting net zero with grant funding support

Freight transport generates 80% of Unisnacks overall carbon footprint and this has proved to be the most stubborn of areas to address. Although all other areas of operation, and particularly the warehouse, have seen significant reductions in its carbon footprint, transport remains a tricky issue to tackle.

Current industry technology does not offer viable options for the size and operation of their HGV fleet, but they continue to scan industry innovations for new technologies and/or ways to improve efficiencies of current fleet through actions such as driver training and monitoring. They proudly consider themselves early adopters of new technology and they will continue to maintain their relationships with key industry bodies and academic institutions (such as Cranfield University) to ensure they have access to news and insights into the latest carbon reducing technology for the logistics sector.

As a responsible food business, Unisnacks are committed to advancing sustainability and addressing climate change through innovative practices. Their efforts in implementing sustainable cold storage solutions, minimise energy consumption while preserving the freshness and nutritional value of food. By reducing wastage throughout the supply chain, they not only conserve resources but also contribute to a healthier planet. These actions reflect their dedication to maximising efficiency and supporting global food security, ensuring that every aspect of their operations upholds environmental responsibility and promotes long-term sustainability.

There is no doubt that Unisnacks will continue to strive and invest in technologies and systems that bring them closer to their net zero goals across all their operations. Their loyal staff, supply chain and customers believe that their future "trailblazing" will be worth watching .....



To find out more about Central Bedfordshire as the ideal location for your advanced logistics business investment, contact:

becentralbedfordshire.co.uk
+44 (0)300 8272
info@becentralbedfordshire.co.uk

UNISNACKS

Central Bedfordshire

BeCentral Bedfordshire