

THINENGINE COMPUTER HELPS LOUISIANA SUGAR CANE PLANT GAIN COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

From pick-up trucks to 18-wheelers, thousands of sugar-cane-carrying trucks line up for miles outside the processing plant and wait in queue for hours (sometimes longer than a day) to weigh and unload their sugar cane.

The long wait is inevitable. And, it can be worsened by outdoor scale and terminal malfunctions. The Louisiana heat and dampness along with all the dust and sugar particles in the air make these malfunctions a real possibility.

This is especially bad news for the farmer who has to rent the truck or pay its driver by the hour. Also, sugarcane spoils quickly and needs to be processed in the mill as soon as possible before it loses its sugar content. The sugar mill needed reliable equipment that could withstand the tough environment and make the weighing and unloading processes quick and easy.

They also needed something to set them apart from the competition. Although some farmers are contracted with certain mills, others have the choice to trade and deliver sugar cane to any mill.

To remain competitive, get the most product and be the first-choice buyer for sugar cane farmers (the sellers), they had to give the sellers what they wanted...money. Payment not price, that is.

In that part of Louisiana, there is a lot of crop sharing – landowners rent portions of their land to be farmed. These small crop sharers may have only a small parcel to sell and literally cannot afford to wait to be paid – they need their money right then and there when they deliver the sugar cane. Many plants take up to 30 days after to cut checks. Incorporating instant payout as part of the delivery procedure certainly appeals to both the small and large-crop farmers.

The Ideal Process

Here's how it works...

Drivers steer their trucks onto a large scale laid onto the ground. The driver gets out of the truck and scans his card/badge (preregistered with a customer number) on an outdoor, wall-mounted terminal. The scale calculates the gross weight of the truck and sugar cane combined and automatically loads the information onto the customer card.

The driver gets back in the vehicle and drives approximately 1,000 feet to the processing plant where he unloads the sugar cane. He then drives the emptied truck forward onto another ground scale with wall-mounted terminal, gets out and swipes his badge again. The scale calculates the tare weight (weight of truck without the product) and subtracts it from the original weight recorded and stored on the card. This determines the weight of the sugar cane delivered for sale.

To receive payment, the driver proceeds to the office which is a drive-up window and hands his card to a plant employee. The employee swipes the card and the system takes the recorded product weight, multiplies it by that day's sugar price and calculates the amount to be paid. A check is printed and given to the driver right there at the drive-up window.

The Solution

All the dust and sugar sub particles floating in the air created quite a challenge for outdoor barcode readers, bringing a whole new meaning to the term "sugar-coated." thinENGINE Computer brought in industrial terminals with sealed badge readers built to endure the dusty, sticky sugar air. We provided cleaning cards that when ran through the badge reader, cleaned out any accumulation.

We interfaced the scales and industrial terminals with a RS232 cable and a piece of software that reads the scale data and puts it through a keyboard buffer which translates and displays it on the terminal screen as if someone had typed it.

It is common for a scale to send a lot of extra data (leading and trailing characters) along with the desired output. But this application only had enough space to hold the weight. Our hardware that interfaced with the scale also acted as a decoder. It was programmed to strip off the unnecessary data and send only the weight to the screen.

thinENGINE's solution helped improve throughput for the sugar cane processing plant, getting them more product and the competitive advantage of giving their customers faster payment. The industrial hardware and software proved so successful, the plant expanded their terminals and weighing stations to provide more lines to accommodate the miles upon miles of delivery trucks that continually choose them to do business with.

Don't let another manufacturer sugar coat their products and services. Get real results with a proven, reliable [thinENGINE industrial computer](#).

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About thinENGINE Computer:

Since 1984, thinENGINE Computer by INDUCOMP Corp. has been providing custom hardware and software solutions to industrial markets. Based in Pacific, Missouri, we are one of the largest and only industrial computer manufacturers that design, fabricate and assemble products in the United States. thinENGINE manufactures more than 50 different models of monitors, industrial computers, keyboards and pointing devices. We have the capabilities to design, fabricate, manufacture, assemble and deliver custom products to meet your unique needs. To learn more, visit www.thinengine.com.