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Cal Poly Senior Project Wins Packaging Industry Award

SAN LUIS OBISPO – A two-part, display-ready asparagus shipper developed by two Cal Poly students in 2010 won the AmeriStar award from the Institute of Packaging Professionals (IoPP), considered by industry professionals to be the most prestigious packaging competition awards in North America.

More than 150 packages were submitted and judged on package innovation, sustainability, protection, economics, performance and marketing.

Orfalea College of Business students Evan Cernokus and Sean Sliger created the design as their senior project. The effort was a partnership with Los Angeles-based Gourmet Trading Co. The students were tasked with revitalizing the labor-intensive packaging previously used by the company to transport bunches of asparagus.

Gourmet Trading Co. adopted the new design, which is loaded in the same manner as a traditional 11-pound asparagus shipper but makes it possible for store employees to display the produce on a shelf without using a box cutter. The top of the box can be removed simply and efficiently, saving retailers time and money, and preventing injury without additional training or safety precautions.

The display-ready re-design can be placed on retail shelves that have a 60-tilt and two-inch lip for an attractive presentation that highlights the product and the brand. The re-design also allows the product to maintain direct contact with the moisture pad below, prolonging the asparagus's shelf life.

"We're proud to be recognized by the IoPP for this display-ready asparagus box," said Julia Inestroza, Gourmet Trading Co. marketing director. "It was a great opportunity for Gourmet to work with Cal Poly's packaging program on a real-world challenge, and we're ecstatic with the results: a box that saves time at the front end and allows for fresher product and less 'shrink' for retailers." (Shrink is a retail term for the money lost by undercharged, damaged or stolen goods.)

The success of the asparagus shipper is a testament to the benefits of Cal Poly's Learn by Doing philosophy, which emphasizes the importance of hands-on learning. What began as Cernokus and Sliger's senior project is now being recognized for its innovation in the packaging industry. Gourmet Trading Co.'s new shipping box will be recognized at an awards reception and dinner in late May.

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