

Bonipak Trucker Lounge Improvements

A Senior Project

Presented to

The Faculty of the Agricultural Education and Communication Department  
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Science

By

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June 2019

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## **Intro**

Throughout the past couple decades, there has been a rapid decline in truck drivers deciding on a career in the commercial transportation industry. It's becoming less of an appealing career for young people to pursue, as drivers spend long periods of time away from their family, work very long hours, and often aren't treated with the best regard (LTX Solutions, 2018). In addition, the level of difficulty in a transportation career is very high, pushing potential drivers away from the industry (Ryan, 2014). The agriculture industry relies heavily on freight services to transport their fresh fruits and vegetables all over the country. In fact, in 2010, the USDA released a major report on agricultural transportation in the United States covering the different modes of transportation that the industry primarily uses. The report provided a statistic that agriculture is the largest user of freight transportation in the United States, with 31 percent of all ton-miles recorded in 2007 being used in the movement of agricultural products (USDA, 2010). While these numbers have likely changed within the past nine years, there is still something to be said about the magnitude of the agriculture industry and how heavily it relies on transportation. With that being said, maintaining a viable transportation force is crucial (Ockendahl, 2015).

Bonita Packing Company, also known as Bonipak, has been a produce grower and shipper in the Santa Maria Valley for nearly 90 years and has contracts with customers all over the United States and Canada. Since 1932, the family owned and operated business has maintained steady growth as the population continues to rise all while making it a goal to uphold their family values and maintain their deep roots within the community. Transitioning into a fourth generation family farm, the Bonipak team hopes to continue to promote growth and maintain a positive reputation within the community and beyond. With multiple trucks passing through its facility on a daily basis year-round, the author believes it's crucial Bonipak keep drivers satisfied in order to show appreciation as well as incentivize younger generations to follow a career path in the trucking industry. Bonipak has a current facility where its truck drivers are able to sit down, grab a snack or drink, and use the restroom. However, this facility is outdated and Bonipak is not aware if the facility meets truck driver needs and expectations. Working alongside Bonipak owners and employees, the author developed a plan to improve Bonipak's trucker lounge and offer drivers a place where they feel appreciated for their services.

## **Background**

In 2015, Bonipak expanded its cooler which is now 40,000 sq. ft. including additional loading docks, cooling equipment, and other updates (Bonipak, 2015). However, the trucker lounge was left to collect

dust. Now that all crucial improvements have been made, it is time to prioritize the truck drivers and the accommodations Bonipak can offer them. Approximately 150 trucks enter and exit the cooling facility every day (L. Castillo, personal communication, May 23, 2019). Bonipak packages and ships several items including the following: artichokes, bok choy, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, celery, cilantro, green cabbage, green leaf, iceberg lettuce, napa, romaine, spinach, sweet anise, riced cauliflower, etc (Bonipak, 2019). Altogether, they will ship roughly 300,000 cartons of fresh produce in any given week (W. George, personal communication, May 23, 2019), resulting in approximately 22.5 million units annually, which ultimately would not be possible without a functioning transportation industry.

The turnover rate for careers in transportation is rapidly increasing; in turn, making the industry appealing to a younger generation is an obstacle of its own (McNally, 2018). Transportation companies are at a crossroads and are scrambling to recover their diminishing workforce, so they are continuing to increase driver compensation to make the industry more appealing (McNally, 2018). However, these growing rates will only be sustainable for so long. It's time for the industry, and all those who surround it, to work diligently in order to create a more appealing transportation industry as a whole.

Similar to gas station convenience stores, truck drivers are in need of a resting place to use the bathroom, possibly take a shower, eat, replenish liquids and wait for their load to be placed in their truck, paperwork completed and back on the road they go. According to an informal survey by the The Trucker's Report, drivers that were surveyed said they would like laundry facilities, plenty of electrical outlets, and free Wi-Fi (The Trucker's Report, 2014). They also requested comfortable chairs, microwaves and an ice machine.

In order to properly update the existing building to modernize Bonipak's Trucker Lounge, the company, general contractors and architects will comply with city and county permitting processes. The building upgrades identified may require commercial remodeling permits and licenses as well as American Disabilities Act compliance regulations. The City of Santa Maria and County of Santa Barbara government offices provide access to commercial plans and developments. Both offices have websites to search archives or can be reached in person and via email. Obtaining building permits can require additional time as square footage increases (County of Santa Barbara, 2019).

## **Methodology**

This project studied the regular challenges faced by truck drivers, particularly in the produce sector, and how the turnover rate has been a growing detriment to the transportation industry. Researchers targeted a local grower and shipper located in the Santa Maria Valley by the name of Bonipak Produce. Working in cooperation with the company's owners, upper management, and employees, a plan was developed to renovate their pre-existing transportation lounge to increase their drivers' satisfaction. Prior to the development of this plan, their lounge lacked several components that would incentivize a driver to come back to their facility to haul their produce. The first step in the research process was the implementation of a survey designed for truck drivers who have visited Bonipak's facility. The survey included a list of questions that focused on what preferred items drivers would like to see in Bonipak's renovated facility. These questions included desired food items, personal input and challenges as a truck driver, previous experience with Bonipak's facility, and more. That data was then processed and presented to Bonipak's owners and upper management to hone in on what amenities need to be included in the renovation process. Once these amenities were prioritized and a budget was finalized, authors met with a local contractor to develop a project proposal and begin demolition. The final product included a finalized plan for improvements such as a snack bar, charging outlets, monitors showing loading stages, and access to hygienic products in the restrooms in hopes to optimize truck drivers' experience at Bonipak Produce. With a facility that meets the needs of truck drivers, who are ultimately the driving force behind the agricultural industry, authors hope to encourage other operations to provide adequate facilities for their drivers as well to promote growth within the transportation industry.

## **Results**

The current survey results show that 37.93% of truck drivers have only been in the industry for one to five years, while nearly 50% have been driving for more than 10 years. This shows that new drivers are entering the industry, however, retaining those drivers is the greatest concern. The results also show that 19.32% of drivers have had an "average" experience at Bonipak's facility, 3.85% percent voted "less than average," 26.92% voted "better than average," and 50% voted "excellent". Although more truck drivers expressed satisfaction, these results still confirm that renovations need to be made. When asked what renovations drivers would like to see at Bonipak's facility, the top six requests were the following: Monitors displaying load stages (57.14%), Computer stations/printers (50.00%), Movies/TV (46.43%), Bonipak merchandise available for purchase (39.29%), Charging stations for electronics (32.14%), and showers (32.14%). When asked how Bonipak's facility compares to other produce shipping facilities, 3.45% answered "much worse", 20.69% answered "about the same," 31.03% answered "better," and 44.83% answered "much better." Responses show that a majority of drivers just want a place to relax,

unwind and have a cup of coffee while they're waiting for their loads. Many also included that they appreciate being treated with kindness and respect.

The author worked in cooperation with Bonipak's operation manager, Ralph Sanchez, to analyze this feedback and work out a rough budget that would be expected moving forward with the project. This included the following estimates:

- 2 sofas: \$800.00
- Tables and chairs: \$1,000.00
- Reconstruct wall for expansion: \$1,000.00
- Internet (WiFi): \$350.00
- Charging stations for phones and other devices: \$250.00
- TV monitors displaying live loading: \$300.00
- TV for entertainment purposes: \$300.00
- New microwave: \$250.00

The total works out to roughly \$4,000.00.

## **Moving Forward**

The author will continue to conduct surveys as needed to support the facility changes. The author will be meeting with architects and general contractors to determine the scope of the building remodel and review costs or changes, permits, and licenses to support the upgrades. The project will then be presented to Bonipak management for completion.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the men and women who dedicate their lives to transporting our fresh food around the country are a driving force behind the nation's economy. With that being said, they deserve every accommodation at each place they stop in order to maintain their physical and mental health as well as to promote growth within the diminishing transportation industry and encourage growth and stability within it. Taking small steps to increase the satisfaction of their customers, Bonipak will show drivers that they are valued, appreciated, and, ultimately, that their hard work does not go unnoticed.

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