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DRAX GROUP PROJECT DESCRIPTION: LEOLA, ARK.

In May, Drax Group announced its intention to build three satellite pellet plants in Arkansas. What began as a relatively small project for us eventually turned into an opportunity to provide a complete material-handling system to one of the world's largest pellet manufacturers.

Drax chose our drag-chain conveyors for the transfer portion of the plant early in the project. We were merely an equipment supplier for these machines at first, but as the project progressed, so did our role. Our scope grew from supplying SMART Conveyors™ to manufacturing equipment for infeed, screening, storage, dust handling, and outfeed. Selecting vendors for systems we don't manufacture, such as dust collection and the silo for pellet storage, as well as engineering portions of the layout, were also included in our purview.

Drax assigned us this work because we had remained involved through the process. We worked with all the equipment suppliers and updated our designs with the project's requirements. Drax also chose us because, as a machinery manufacturer, our primary source of income is from equipment sales, not engineering time. We charge relatively little for our engineering work compared to EPC groups and thus offered Drax an excellent value for our services.

The result worked well for both us and Drax. We developed a simple layout with equipment compliant with the recently updated NFPA 664 Standard for the Prevention of Fires and Explosions in Wood Processing and Woodworking Facilities—a challenge for our design team that required hours of simulations and hands-on testing as they proved our equipment's safety. We also reduced the mill's infeed system cost by utilizing our trailer-receiving bin rather than a truck dump.

Besides the receiving bin and conveyors, we manufactured the containerized feedstock storage, eight metering bins, and a disc screener to remove oversized materials from the infeed stream. We didn't include a fines screener, as we didn't (and still do not) anticipate the need for one because our conveyors are uniquely designed to handle pellets gently and will not break them up like screw conveyors, pneumatic-handling systems, or other chain-style conveyors. There are also few transfer points after the pellet mill, which should minimize pellet degradation.

Alongside this project, we gained the opportunity to install our SMART Conveyors™ at Drax's pellet plant in LaSalle Parish, Louisiana, and demonstrate their capabilities before the construction of Drax's first satellite mill in Leola, Arkansas. That installation went well, and Drax's plant manager was impressed with the conveyors' performance. Our equipment ran so quietly that when a competitor turned on one of their conveyors, the plant manager initially thought it was broken—it was that much noisier than ours.

The pellet plant in Leola is nearing completion, with production scheduled to begin later this year. We're confident our machines will contribute to a lower operational cost for Drax.