



Post Consumer Brands Boosts Confidence in Dry RTE Testing and 24/7 Customer Support.

Key Insights

- Post Consumer Brands manage *Salmonella* risk in dry RTE foods where pathogens can persist for months, even years in low-moisture environments.
- 24/7 scientific support and curve interpretation enables faster, more confident decisions during presumptive positives.
- Human movement and traffic flow are major contamination drivers, making hygienic zoning and behavioral controls critical.
- SureTrend® and KLEANZ® unify sanitation, EMP, allergen, and product testing data to speed investigations and improve audit readiness.

Post Consumer Brands: A Portfolio Built on Dry, Ready-to-Eat

Post Consumer Brands (PCB), part of Post Holdings, produces a broad range of dry, ready-to-eat foods, including breakfast cereals, granola, nut butters such as Peter Pan®, and dry pet food such as 9Lives®. The company operates six cereal plants, seven nut butter or granola facilities, and four pet food plants across the United States and Canada.

PCB's portfolio is dominated by dry products, a category that carries unique food safety challenges because *Salmonella* can survive for long periods in low-moisture environments.

Challenges

Dry RTE manufacturing presents several microbiological risks for companies like Post Consumer Brands. Pamela Wilger, Fellow Scientist, Microbiology, Post Consumer Brands also highlighted that *Salmonella* can persist for months to years in dry foods and plant infrastructure and can become active again with even small amounts of water such as condensation or humidity. This makes control of dry facilities particularly difficult, especially since the production runs can be as long as 45 days. This highlights the importance of preventing harborage and validating dry-clean sanitation.

Another challenge Pam emphasized is the role of people and movement inside the plant. Footwear, tools, maintenance activities, wheels, and employee traffic across hygienic zones can transfer *Salmonella* from raw areas into ready-to-eat areas. Human behavior is therefore one of the highest-risk variables in dry manufacturing.

These operational realities also mean that rapid and accurate decision-making is essential. A single presumptive positive can result in a plant shutdown and significant cost. PCB needed a reliable way to distinguish true positives from atypical PCR results. In addition, PCB's data previously lived in multiple systems, including micro results, sanitation verification, allergen data, and EMP records. This made investigations slower and trend analysis more difficult. A unified view of environmental and product data became critical for conducting timely root-cause analysis and implementing preventive controls.



Solution

To address these challenges, Post Consumer Brands adopted an integrated approach that includes the Hygiena® real-time PCR diagnostics, solutions for environmental monitoring, SureTrend® data management analytics, KLEANZ® sanitation management, and 24/7 technical support. PCB relies on Hygiena's validated real-time BAX® System PCR assays for extensive *Salmonella* testing across nut butters, pet food, and cereal products. This includes matrices that can inhibit PCR, such as cinnamon-containing cereals, which require additional cleanup steps.

A major part of PCB's solution is an atypical-result verification workflow designed to quickly distinguish true positives from irregular PCR signals, helping the team avoid unnecessary shutdowns while maintaining food safety.

When PCB receives a presumptive positive, Hygiena scientists review the PCR file and amplification curves, often within minutes, to assess whether the result appears atypical. The laboratory then prepares PCB then prepares multiple additional PCR replicates from the same enrichment and runs them on the same system. Results are available in less than four hours.

If all replicates are negative, the sample is considered negative. If any are positive, PCB proceeds to cultural confirmation. Pam explained that this approach allows PCB to respond rapidly to unexpected results while maintaining the appropriate level of scientific caution.

PCB is also adopting SureTrend and KLEANZ to bring together environmental results, sanitation verification, allergen and mycotoxin data, finished product micro results, and maintenance records in one system. Having all this information together supports faster investigations, trending, and audit readiness.

The company also benefits from Hygiena's 24/7 scientific partnership. This includes rapid curve interpretation, guidance on validation for challenging matrices, and collaboration with PCB's third-party laboratories. Pam shared that this level of responsiveness and technical support has become a true extension of their internal food safety capability.

Results

By implementing Hygiena's PCR and analytics workflow, Post Consumer Brands strengthened its ability to detect, interpret, and respond to potential *Salmonella* and *Listeria* risks in dry RTE operations. With input from Hygiena's technical support team, PCB improved decision-making speed and confidence by resolving atypical results without halting production unnecessarily; this helped protect both uptime and product quality.

Environmental control improved as PCB enhanced its hygienic zoning, traffic mapping, and environmental monitoring programs. These practices help prevent contamination from moving between raw and ready-to-eat zones, especially given the risk associated with human movement.

Verification of dry-clean sanitation also became stronger. ATP monitoring, indicator organisms, and PCR verification help PCB validate cleaning performance in facilities where wet cleaning is limited.

With SureTrend, PCB can now bring together previously siloed data, including sanitation, allergens, mycotoxins, and micro results. This supports faster trend identification, more effective corrective actions, and stronger audit readiness across plants.

PCB also reduced the operational and financial impact of testing-related interruptions. Preventing even a single unnecessary shutdown can result in significant savings in production time and labor.



Why Hygiena

PCB highlighted several reasons why Hygiena is a trusted partner in their dry RTE food safety program:

- Validated BAX® System PCR for difficult dry matrices such as peanut butter, pet food, chocolate, and cinnamon-containing cereals
- SureTrend and KLEANZ data analytics unify EMP, sanitation, allergens, mycotoxin, and maintenance data for deeper trend analysis
- 24/7 scientific partnership including curve interpretation, troubleshooting, and collaboration with third-party labs
- A collaborative mindset with Hygiena scientists working closely with PCB's plant teams
- Global validation footprint including AOAC, AFNOR, Health Canada, and ISO