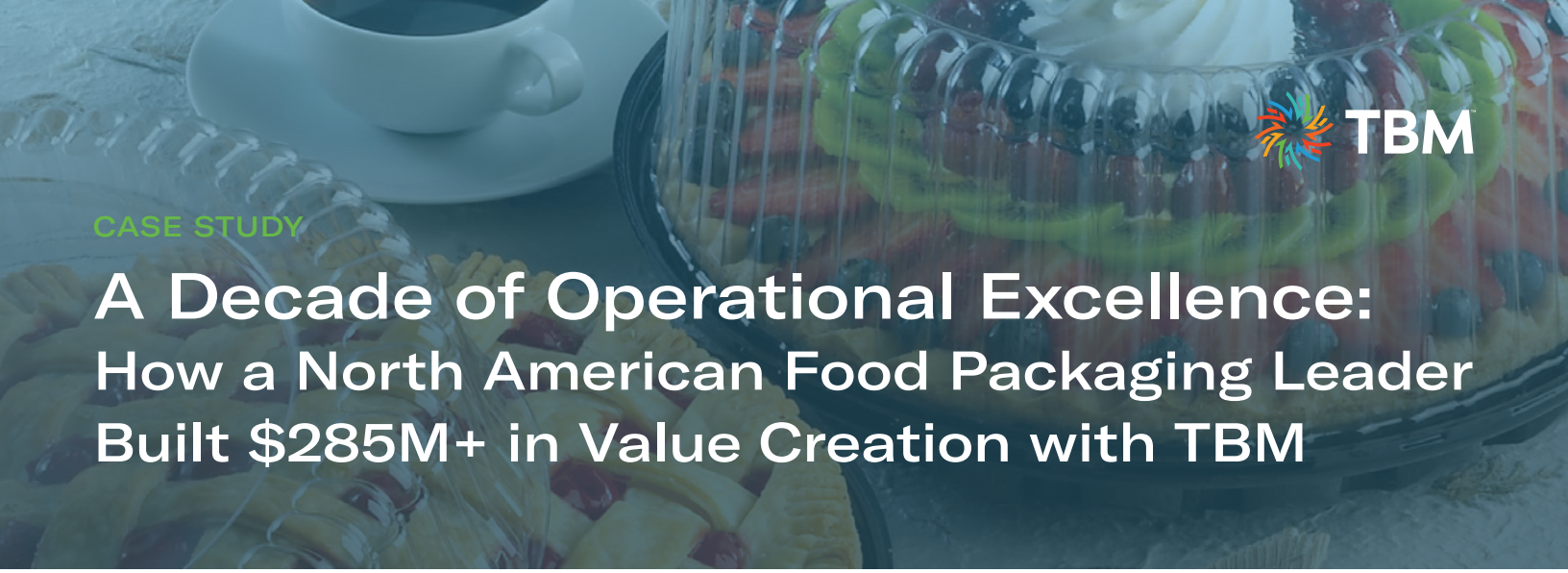

CASE STUDY

A Decade of Operational Excellence:
How a North American Food Packaging Leader Built $285M+ in Value Creation with TBM

Client

North American food packaging leader —high-mix, high-volume manufacturer & distributor of food service disposables and packaging products. 57 manufacturing facilities, 12,000 employees, 17,000 SKUs.

Challenge

Build lean CI capability from a single plant to an enterprise system supporting aggressive growth-by- acquisition across 50+ sites while protecting margins, improving supply chain efficiency, and sustaining gains.

Solution

Hands-on advisor, coach, and implementation partner — embedding capability inside the client's teams at every level, from plant floor to executive leadership.

Results

- $22M+ in direct P&L savings (enterprise transformation)
- 17% revenue growth & $250M cost reduction (multi-year)
- $1M inventory reduction; fill rate 97.7→98.5%
- Forecast accuracy improved 55→75% (supply chain)
- 33% EBITDA Improvement in one year
- 30% productivity gain; ~$1M annual labor savings
- 12-pt OEE gain; $12.7M annualized savings

Building a Lean Powerhouse — Site by Site, System by System

When a leading North American food packaging manufacturer first engaged TBM, the assignment was straightforward: reverse lagging productivity at a single thermoforming plant. What followed was one of the most sustained, multi-dimensional operational transformations in the packaging industry — spanning more than 13 years, 50+ sites, and every lever of operational and supply chain performance.

The company was not in crisis. A $3.6 billion producer of food service disposables and packaging across 57 manufacturing facilities and 12,000 employees, it was profitable and growing — largely through acquisition. But its VP of Operations saw clearly what was at risk. Plants were improving in isolation. Gains weren't being shared. Continuous Improvement (CI) activity wasn't connected to the corporate bottom line. And the margins required to fund an aggressive acquisition strategy demanded more than incremental progress.

TBM was brought in not as a vendor hired to fix problems, but as a long-term operational partner — one that would teach the company to see waste, build the internal capability to eliminate it, and ultimately embed the systems and leadership behaviors needed to sustain improvements long after any single engagement ended.

FIVE PHASES, ONE COMPOUNDING CAPABILITY

PHASE 1
YEAR 1-6
Lean foundation & plant-level kaizen

PHASE 2
YEAR 6-10
Enterprise transformation & strategy deployment

PHASE 3
YEAR 6-10
Thermoforming productivity — ~$1m saved

PHASE 4
YEAR 10
Supply chain transformation — $1m inventory reduction

PHASE 5
YEAR 10-13
Film extrusion oee — $12.7m annualized savings

PHASE 1 - LEAN FOUNDATION & PLANT-LEVEL KAIZEN

Establishing the Lean Baseline Across the Plant Network

TBM INTRODUCES KAIZEN, BUILDS THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONFIDENCE TO CHANGE

TBM's engagement began with a traditional lean assessment at a thermoforming plant in the northeastern U.S., followed by a structured series of kaizen events. The work in this phase was deliberately built around teaching rather than fixing. TBM consultants embedded with plant teams to identify waste, introduce 5S discipline, and establish standard work — but the explicit objective was to shift how frontline employees and supervisors saw their own operations. Kaizen events were structured as learning environments. Plant teams developed the plans, implemented the changes, and owned the results.

One foundational insight that unlocked material gains: the company had never considered segmenting products by ease of changeover or dedicating extrusion lines to specific sheet types by volume. Every line was set up to run every product — a legacy of flexibility assumptions that created enormous hidden changeover complexity. TBM worked with plant teams to challenge that assumption, and line dedication by product family became a repeating pattern of improvement across the network.

TBM'S ROLE

TBM led lean assessments and kaizen facilitation at each plant, working side-by-side with operators and supervisors. Consultants provided hands-on teaching in waste identification, 5S, standard work, and setup reduction — not directing from the outside but embedding as active participants. TBM also introduced the company's first formal CI calendar structure, ensuring events were regular, documented, and tied to measurable plant performance targets.

RESULTS

67%
More cases per man-hour (thermoforming)

25%
Higher throughput per machine-hour

83%
Reduction in machine setup time

PHASE 2 - CONNECTING EVERY SITE TO ONE IMPROVEMENT ENGINE

Connecting Every Site to One Improvement Engine

TBM ARCHITECTS A FOUR-LEVEL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM ACROSS 50+ SITES

As lean capability matured at the plant level, leadership recognized a systemic gap: local improvements weren't translating into enterprise performance. Gains weren't holding, CI work had no visible link to corporate financial targets, and a growing acquisition pipeline was outpacing the company's ability to replicate its improvement model.

TBM partnered with the executive team and Director of CI to design a four-level strategy deployment architecture. At Level 1, an annual SWOT-driven planning session established three- to five-year objectives and one-year priorities. At Level 2, value stream leaders built bottom-up plans aligned to those priorities. Levels 3 and 4 cascaded specific improvement projects, monthly countermeasures, and financial performance tracking down to plants, warehouses, and sales teams — creating site-level accountability reviewable at any time.

Simultaneously, TBM led an accelerated best-practices replication model. Rather than improving one facility at a time, regional CI leaders brought cross-site teams to single kaizen events, then set up replication calendars for each participating plant. For an organization that had historically run its facilities in near-total isolation, the resulting cross-site collaboration represented as much a cultural shift as an operational one.

The enterprise transformation phase delivered results that were significant by any measure — creating the financial foundation for continued acquisitions and positioning the company for a successful private equity transaction.

TBM'S ROLE

TBM played the role of both architect and active advisor throughout the enterprise transformation. TBM consultants directly facilitated the annual Level 1 strategy deployment sessions with the CEO and executive team, designed the four-level workbook framework, trained CI leaders on how to run and audit the system, and co-led the value stream replication events. TBM's senior consultants held regular touchpoints with the company's VP of Operations and Director of CI — functioning less as external consultants and more as an embedded operational leadership resource. The client's Business System, which became the company's proprietary operating framework, was built with direct TBM involvement and guidance.

RESULTS

$22M	+38%	17%	$250M
P&L savings in one year	EBITDA improvement	Revenue growth	Costs removed

PHASE 3 - THERMOFORMING PRODUCTIVITY — ~$1M SAVED

30% Productivity Gain in a High-Automation Thermoforming Plant

A SIX-MONTH ENGAGEMENT PROVES WHAT'S POSSIBLE WITHOUT CAPITAL INVESTMENT

With enterprise alignment in place and the Business System running across the network, TBM was engaged for a focused productivity improvement project at a highly automated thermoforming facility — 11 lines running 24/7, profitable, there was no burning platform. The site leader believed untapped potential existed and asked TBM to help find it.

TBM began the six-month engagement with a detailed assessment phase. The analysis revealed that loader value-adding time was below 50% of available working time — meaning each loader could realistically cover three to four lines rather than the current one to two. Total potential annual labor savings of just under $1 million were identified.

TBM then designed a careful three-phase transition: rebalancing lines, expanding finished goods buffers, installing an andon replenishment system, and developing standard work built to worst-case production rates. New standard work instruction sheets were developed for operators and floaters, written to 'worst case scenario' production rates so they were realistic and sustainable. MDI (Managing for Daily Improvement) training was rolled out to all supervisors, reinforcing the daily management disciplines that their Business System had established at the enterprise level.

The plant operations leader — a 30-year lean veteran — participated in every training session and worked side-by-side with supervisors through all three phases. TBM remained on-site through full implementation, coaching supervisors and building operator competency across all four shifts.

TBM'S ROLE

TBM conducted the initial labor assessment and opportunity sizing, designed the future-state labor model, facilitated the three-phase transition planning process, and worked alongside plant leadership throughout implementation. Consultants developed all standard work documentation, the andon system design, and the MDI training materials — then transferred ownership of each element to the internal team. TBM's ongoing presence on the floor during implementation was critical: changes to established routines in a 24/7 operation require active coaching to sustain, and TBM provided that coaching daily.

RESULTS

29.6%
reduction in total production positions

~$1M
Annualized labor savings

Zero
Job losses — realized via attrition

PHASE 4 - SUPPLY CHAIN TRANSFORMATION — $1M INVENTORY REDUCTION

Demand-Driven Replenishment Cuts Inventory, Raises Fill Rates

TBM BUILDS A CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAM TO REDESIGN THE VALUE CHAIN

As the enterprise management system matured, the supply chain remained misaligned with actual demand. End-of-quarter promotions had trained customers to stockpile, creating volume peaks and valleys that distorted production schedules — which were driven by a subjective forecast with little connection to real customer pull. Point-of-sale data existed but went unanalyzed.

TBM assembled a cross-functional team spanning the full value stream to work through a structured diagnostic for a single product family. Three initiatives emerged: shifting to pull-based demand replenishment, redesigning forecasting to incorporate statistical methods and regional POS data, and rationalizing the most volatile SKUs.

The pull analysis produced a counterintuitive finding: nearly 75% of products were candidates for pull — far more than assumed. The technical transition required a parallel mindset shift in manufacturing leadership, moving from forecast-as-trigger to forecast-as-capacity-planning-tool. TBM coached both supply chain and operations teams through that change.

For forecasting, TBM introduced a statistically based methodology that incorporated regional point-of-sale data and upcoming promotional calendars, building an 18-month rolling forecast with weekly precision for the near term. TBM also helped establish the process governance: who owned the forecast at each regional level, how it was updated, and how discrepancies between forecast and actual demand would trigger corrective action.

TBM'S ROLE

TBM led the diagnostic, facilitated the cross-functional team, and designed all three solution components: the pull-system architecture, the statistical forecasting methodology, and the SKU rationalization framework. Consultants worked directly with both the supply chain team and manufacturing leadership to bridge the two functions — a gap that had historically allowed the demand-planning dysfunction to persist. TBM trained the internal team on the new processes and remained engaged through implementation to ensure the pull system was operating correctly and the forecasting governance was embedded.

RESULTS

$1M
Pull system inventory reduction (one line)

98.5%
Fill rate (up from 97.7%)

55→75%
Forecast accuracy

$500K
Projected transport savings

PHASE 5 - FILM EXTRUSION OEE — $12.7M ANNUALIZED SAVINGS

A 90-Day Project Frees Up $12.7M in Film Extrusion

TBM RE-ENGAGES POST-MERGER TO DRIVE OUTPUT AND BUILD CAPABILITY

Following a merger into a larger packaging enterprise, the company re-engaged TBM to address a focused challenge: a 25-extruder film extrusion facility missing pounds-out-the-door targets due to scrap losses, inconsistent equipment performance, and insufficient process capability.

The engagement was deliberately scoped: three months, four key extruders, with the goal of increasing output while building the internal capability to sustain it. TBM began with a rapid diagnostic to identify and prioritize the highest-leverage OEE losses across availability, performance, and quality.

The solution centered on three interconnected work streams.

1. **VISUAL MANAGEMENT & DAILY CONTROL**
   Leader standard work, T-card tracking, and tiered daily meetings gave the operations team real-time visibility into extruder performance and a structured process for addressing losses as they occurred.

2. **STANDARD WORK & OPTIMIZED PARAMETERS**
   TBM created standard work and routing for operators and defined optimized process parameters — screw speeds, temperatures, pressures — to improve yield and reduce scrap.

3. **PEOPLE CAPABILITY**
   The process engineering team was small and technically limited, so TBM worked directly with engineers and operators to upgrade technical knowledge, optimize roles, and develop the leadership to run the daily management process independently after TBM's departure.

TBM'S ROLE

TBM entered this engagement as a hands-on operational partner at the plant level, deploying consultants on-site throughout the three-month project. The TBM team led the rapid OEE diagnostic, designed the visual management system, wrote the standard work and process parameter documentation, and delivered technical training to operators and engineers. Critically, TBM's approach was to build capability — not dependency. Every tool and system delivered was designed to be operated by the internal team without TBM present, and the engagement concluded with a structured knowledge transfer to ensure long-term sustainment.

RESULTS

+13%	+12pts	$12.7M
Average pounds-per-day output	OEE improvement	Annualized savings (ex. raw materials)

Cumulative Results: Thirteen Years of Compounding Value

Across five phases and more than 13 years, TBM's engagement with this client demonstrates what is possible when lean CI is built as a compounding capability rather than a series of one-time projects. Each phase created the conditions for the next: plant-level kaizen produced the demonstrated results that justified enterprise deployment; strategy deployment aligned 50+ sites around financial goals that gave supply chain and productivity improvements enterprise-level visibility; and the embedded Business System created an internal culture of improvement that outlasted any individual TBM engagement.

The company's trajectory — from a collection of independently managed plants to a purpose-built operational excellence machine capable of integrating acquisitions rapidly and profitably — reflects both the ambition of its leadership and the effectiveness of its partnership with TBM. As one TBM consultant who worked with the client across multiple phases observed: the company went from being capital-oriented to working-capital-oriented, from worrying about productivity to worrying about cash.

That shift in mindset — embedded at every level — is ultimately what drove the financial results.

A Lasting Partnership in Operational Excellence

For packaging manufacturers navigating the dual pressures of margin protection and growth-by-acquisition, TBM's approach delivers at both ends of that tension. Operational excellence is not a destination — it is an organizational capability, and one that compounds in value the more consistently it is invested in.

What made this partnership distinctive was TBM's sustained commitment to building internal capability at every level — from plant operators learning to see waste for the first time, to a CEO embedding CI disciplines into executive strategy deployment, to engineers upgrading technical competence on high-performance extrusion lines. In each phase, the goal was the same: leave the client stronger and more self-sufficient than before.

Ready To Build Operational Excellence That Scales?

TBM's multi-phase approach to operational excellence offers a proven model for building lasting competitive advantage.

Learn More →