

How a Global Ingredient Manufacturer Solved Labor Shortages & Boosted Reliability with Blue Ridge



The Challenge: Labor Gaps & Harsh Conditions

At one of the largest starch production facilities in North America, a global ingredient manufacturer was battling a serious challenge: they couldn't hire enough skilled electrical and instrumentation (E&I) technicians to keep the plant running reliably.

Budgeted for 30 techs, the site could only fill 14 roles—less than half of what was needed to support daily operations.

The 50-acre site included two large production plants separated by a railroad, with some buildings reaching 150 feet tall. Technicians averaged 12 miles per day on foot in dusty, noisy, and physically demanding conditions.

Combined with strict seniority systems that limited training and locked newer employees into less desirable shifts with mandatory overtime, turnover was constant.

Prior contractor attempts had failed due to poor quality work, high staff turnover, and missteps that led to grievances—disputes that triggered double-pay penalties for union staff. Engineering teams were forced to take on daily maintenance themselves, risking burnout and performance issues.

What the manufacturer needed wasn't just more manpower—they needed experienced and adaptable technicians who could seamlessly integrate with their existing workforce, and deliver impactful results.

Despite being budgeted for 30 E&I techs, only 14 roles were filled—leaving essential systems vulnerable in a harsh 50-acre facility.



The Blue Ridge Solution: Strategic Staffing and Seamless Execution

Blue Ridge (BR) delivered a tailored solution that emphasized safety, technical expertise, and operational fit. From day one, BR's service director worked directly with the plant's maintenance manager, planners, and department supervisors to build a labor support model that aligned with union expectations while filling critical gaps.

Instead of attempting to deploy a full team of 30, Blue Ridge strategically placed 8 highly skilled E&I technicians on site—enough to close the most urgent gaps with zero friction. They assumed full responsibility for two key departments:

Processing (North Plant)

The site's most demanding area, requiring emergency lockouts, chemical handling, and tight batch-based production timelines.

Packaging (South Plant)

A robotics-heavy department with advanced automation, intrinsically safe systems, and complex HMI interfaces for palletizing, weighing, and inspection.

On packaging lines, BR staff troubleshooted conveyor stoppages and checkweigher malfunctions by verifying voltage at the MCC, inspecting photo-eyes, and walking control room operators through panel resets—documenting each step to build institutional knowledge. These weren't ordinary assignments—they required process discipline, strong communication, and technical confidence.

Throughout all work, Blue Ridge prioritized communication. Shift reports, SAP updates, and voluntary PTO coverage helped keep operations smooth. By sticking strictly to assigned tasks, maintaining clear boundaries with union leadership, and communicating proactively, the team avoided triggering a single grievance—no small feat in such a tightly regulated environment.





The Results: Increased Reliability, Lower Cost, Zero Grievances

Within months, Blue Ridge's impact was clear:

Operational Continuity

The plant maintained uptime in two previously under-resourced departments.

Seamless Integration

BRA techs worked hand in hand with the client's maintenance team, other contractors, and management.

Cost-Effective Coverage

With just 8 technicians, BR helped cover the work of 16 open roles—lowering costs while improving reliability.

Technical Uplift

Beyond keeping systems online, BR helped build better documentation, trained plant engineers, and shared SOPs for recurring issues like dust bin flow errors and LOTO preparedness.

The partnership proved so effective that the facility chose to keep Blue Ridge on indefinitely—a decision driven by performance, not just necessity.

Final Takeaway

In complex, high-stakes manufacturing environments, the right partner doesn't just fill seats—they solve problems. Blue Ridge brought disciplined, experienced, and technically capable support to one of the toughest production environments in the industry—and delivered real, lasting value.



Looking for support navigating labor gaps, constraints, or critical systems?

Contact Blue Ridge today to learn how our strategic staffing can boost your uptime—without the friction.

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