

Does Milly Diamond sparkle?

By Anny Dentener
(Adecron Food Tech Consulting)

Programme: Milly Diamond Costing & Labelling, Version 2.1.10

Supplier: Milly Systems Ltd, Auckland, New Zealand

Cost: \$2,550. Alternatives: Costing (\$1,750); or NIP/labelling (\$995).

Annual fees apply (from \$450) and cover free support and upgrades.

Website: www.millysystems.co.nz

Rating: ⭐⭐

When you need production (raw material and labour) cost control and ongoing nutrition label calculation and printing, an integrated package such as Milly may be the answer. My objective was to validate the labelling version, and to test the program's usefulness for small to medium food manufacturers. After two unsuccessful attempts to get the NIP/Labelling version working I obtained a 30 day demo of the full Diamond Costing and Labelling. This can be integrated with MoneyWorks for an enterprise accounting system ("Milly Gold" @ \$10,000). Putting the software through its paces, I often felt more like a beta-tester than a reviewer. Even the 4th and last installation by one of the software writers had significant problems. The software requires installation in the root directory, something my IT Manager was not happy with. This is required because of its dependency on a database using a Microsoft Access Runtime version. On opening, the menu screen provides access to Recipes, Labelling, Maintenance and Reports, set up with running a bakery in mind (Figure 1).

Working with the "Recipes" and "Labelling" was the starting point, so I pulled out the tried and trusted Chocolate coated Anzac biscuit recipe that I have used to test other nutrition software packages. This tests the program for baking losses, entering of

new raw materials, characterising ingredient declaration and mixing of sub-components into a finished recipe. To get started you first need to allocate a sector to work in. There are four designated sectors (Pastry, Sandwich, Bread, Work-In-Progress) but you can change names to suit in the Maintenance section. You cannot add or delete sectors, but that may change in future. Do your product allocation within "Departments" (product types), with unlimited numbers of files. However make sure you do it at the beginning, as I lost sub-sectors and products when I edited them later.

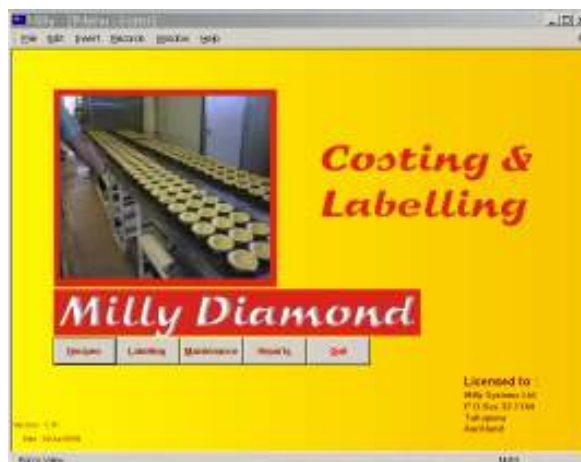


Figure 1: Opening screen

Once a recipe has been entered it can be shifted from one finished goods sector to another, but not to or from the Work in Progress (WIP) sector. WIP can only be used for sub-recipes which are never sold by themselves, e.g. tomato topping on pizza. The WIP per kg cost and nutrition values are then added to the Raw materials list, and become available for use in other recipes. This feature worked in installation 3, but was lost again in installation 4 as the Update Raw Material button had disappeared. It also should carry all compound ingredients forward for the ingredient listing and the characterising percentage, which it did not

do for the steak pie filling in Milly's "Steak pie" example.



Figure 2: Recipe entry screen with nutrition and cost info

When entering your recipe (Figure 2) you need to remember exactly how the file lists the raw materials, as word recognition is poor. It could not find "plain flour", only "flour, xxxx". You will need to enter your own raw materials so choose suitable names. Double clicking on the raw material in a recipe transfers you to the raw materials list, allowing checking and updating of information. Moisture loss when baking the biscuit is covered by "baked weight". One major error in the software until I pointed this out recently was that, with the baking losses, moisture was adjusted but other components were not proportionally increased (an unfortunate poor understanding of food technology). Details can be added about Method and Labour input and Wastage.

The Maintenance section allows entry of cost of each labour type. Variable labour costs are changed when recipes are scaled up or down. However, the fixed cost was also changed on screen despite the Help information stating that it should stay the same. The Print recipe option is useful when wanting less or more product than the standard recipe e.g. pies. Key in the number wanted and it will print the adjusted recipe and labour amounts for

the product however somehow the recipe for the filling lists all ingredients at 0 kg.

The Pricing and Unit cost part is very useful, calculating the price you should charge for a desired Gross Profit Margin. The Nutrition information is displayed for both the entered serving size and 100g and covers the mandatory NIP. Double clicking on a nutrient shows a nutrient contribution box with details where e.g. sodium comes from, handy for nutrition-focussed formulation. After "baking" the Anzac biscuits (using baked weight) and "making" a chocolate coating I wanted to combine these two products. However, this does not seem possible. Both needed entering in the WIP section in order to add them to the raw materials before combining in a product recipe, even if I also wanted a plain biscuit option.

I did enter both again in the WIP section and made the product using the third installed software. When I checked the final ingredient list, it had "lost" all the sub-ingredients of the Anzac biscuit and the chocolate coating, but did state chocolate coating at 12% as characterising ingredient. Amounts for sodium indicated that it was in grams, while stating it as mg, a factor 1000 error! The labelling option allows you to print NIP and ingredients with lot code, barcode, BB options and nominate a shelf life for printing. Label printing can start at any point on a label sheet, saving money. Label options are preset for 8, 12 and 18 Avery labels/page for laser or inkjet printing, and Dymo Label printing. Data can be exported to other label printing software.

I was expecting to be able to copy recipes for variations on a theme. While it did copy the original labour cost structure, it lost all recipe details. The new recipe appeared in the list of recipes, but could not be opened until I had moved to and from another sector.

Under "Materials", raw material details can be entered covering pack sizes and price (works out cost per kg), allocation to a raw

materials category, Preferred Supplier, and storage location. The "Chain" button highlights in which recipes a certain raw material is used. Good to know when you want to make changes. Odd quantities can be defined here, e.g. a "pinch" of something is x gram. Nutrition info and the ingredients listings above and below 5% are also entered here. When I tried this out with a chocolate compound, the database indicated that the amount of data was too big for the under 5% entry, and I needed to delete part of it to get it to work. Not good. If the compound ingredients of the raw material are known in %, this can be entered so these can be "folded" into the rest of the recipe but this did not work properly when tested.

Nutrition data can only be entered from the NZ Food Files database. The option to be able to edit these original nutrition tables in the "Maintenance" section is very unwise, as was evident by cream supposedly having 1,043g CHO/100g. I strongly suggest a "read and use only" original database, with a separate user database for entry of raw material supplier info, as in previous versions.

Tidying up here and there is needed as kj should be kJ, protein is often spelled as "protien" and Calcium is listed on screen. Calcium can only be declared once it reaches 10% of the RDI per serving. It has been replaced on the label with Dietary Fibre in the latest versions. The intention may have been to list Potassium. The label header should be "Nutrition Information" not "nutritional", after all you cannot eat the information. This and a range of other errors indicate that the software writers are not fully conversant with the Food Standards. The Help file is rather limited with poor access options and did not help with all problems. The programme is littered with sloppy spelling errors. It is often not clear whether units are gram, kg or unit.

"Reports" options starts with Price Lists and "Supplier lists" with contact details and detailed reports. Purchasing orders can be easily generated. Production reports cover "Recipes", and reports on costs and margins. Stock take forms and a wastage summary sheet can be printed.

Checking references indicates reasonable satisfaction with the program. All users had experienced stability problems. Learning how to use it took quite a while, with the information in the Manual and Help files only becoming clear second time round. Difficulties with the program meant that one user only used it for nutrition calculation, and worked out the ingredient listings separately. Another mentioned annoyance with the WIP section which slowed use down when needing labels quickly in a busy bakery, as labels cannot be generated for WIP products. Support with problems was rated as good.

My overall conclusion is that this software has great potential but (as yet) fails to deliver. There are some serious programme and database management issues which need addressing. My initial expectation was a program focussed just on bakeries but I can see that it may well work, once improved of course, for other food manufacturers. If you only need NIP calculation or more extensive nutrient, ingredient and allergen tracking, there are better and cheaper options. In answer to my question, no it does not sparkle.

Anny Dentener runs her own independent Food Tech Consultancy company Adecron Ltd (www.adecron.co.nz) and has no commercial interest in selling software.

Contact: anny.dentener@adecron.co.nz

Original article published in the "Food New Zealand" magazine, August 2004, Volume 4 (4): pages 48-49. Copyright © Anny Dentener 2004.