

COMPAC SORTING EQUIPMENT LTD

From grading spuds, to sizing fruit, Compac Sorting Equipment is a pioneer when it comes to designing machinery for the fruit and vegetable sorting.



Sorting out the solutions

From grading spuds in South Australia, checking citrus for blemishes in California, sizing fruit in Italy or kiwifruit in the home country, a New Zealand company has it sorted.

Compac Sorting Equipment Ltd, specialists in fruit and vegetable sorting equipment, exports its machinery to major packinghouses around the world. The equipment enables pack houses to sort faster, more accurately and grade according to size, colour, blemish and even taste.

Thanks to the awarding of US standards certification late last year, Compac is boosting local production to meet demand.

Certification means Compac will be able to manufacture in New Zealand the large motor control panels for its machines rather than rely on American sources, as they have had to do in the past.

Compac's Auckland manufacturing plant is now a certified facility complying with UL508a, standards, supporting the company's customised machinery

and associated industrial control-panels. The process is on-going, with unannounced audits at any time, a spokesman said.

Before certification, some of the New Zealand-made machinery had to be reworked by Compac's US distributor, who encouraged the company to seek compliance.

"Our machinery complied with the safety standards in NZ and Australia but didn't meet some of the details of the very stringent US standards, which themselves vary from state to state," Compac electronics production manager Mike Thornley explained.

Certification gives Compac big advantages for continued sales growth in the United States and more work for New Zealand, the reverse of what is happening with many companies which are moving production offshore.

Like many other highly successful niche-market companies, Compac's origins lie with an inventor's solution to a problem. In Compac's case, young

electrical engineer Hamish Kennedy – who grew up on a Kerikeri kiwifruit orchard – designed and built an electronic sizer and packing line for the family business.

Requests for more lines followed and in 1984 Compac Sorting Equipment was founded. It has grown to be a global leader in the field of fruit and vegetable-sorting technology, exporting equipment around the world since 1991.

Mr Kennedy, who continues to head the company, remains passionate about design.

In 2001, Compac installed the first InVision 9000 blemish grading system for citrus in California. Numerous other successes followed in the US and now more than 40% of Washington State's apple crop is sorted and graded using Compac technology, a figure that underlines the importance of gaining US standards certification.

In its 20th anniversary year, Compac expanded into a new factory in Onehunga, adjacent to its existing factory and offices. Not only was this a reflection of growth since 1984 but it also enabled all processes – design, fabrication and assembly – to be completed

on a single site. There is also space for further expansion.

To take advantage of strong European demand, joint-venture company Compac Sorma Europe SPA was formed in 2004 with the Italian-based Sorma Group. The joint-venture company began manufacturing Compac equipment and sorting lines in August that year.

Manufacturing in Europe was the logical step after many years of exporting from NZ. The delivery time due to shipping meant only the customers who planned well in advance could purchase a Compac solution. The move is a success with strong sales and expansion into Italy and other markets that were previously difficult to enter.

Although certification has headlined the company's American markets, it is very much a global player, having exported to over 20 countries including many countries in Europe plus the Canary Islands, Morocco, Chile, Argentina, Peru, Canada, Korea, Australia and South Africa.

US certification underpins Compac's status as a world leader.