

Technology reduces packing cost

from material by Compac Sorting Equipment

Making the most from applying smart thinking and even smarter technology is helping fruit pack houses drive up margins and 'pack smarter'.

The resulting labour savings are making a difference to businesses, but it's the increase of overall efficiency and capacity of the packing shed that is creating the buzz and some pack houses are reporting that installing blemish pre-grading for apples is having significant impact on the way they do business.

Compac Sorting Equipment now has several installations of InVision 9000 blemish pre-graders under its corporate belt. In USA, Washington State's Larson Fruit and Zirkle were early adopters in adding the new technology to their packing sheds. While the technology there was not new—having been used in citrus for some years—its application to apples was.

Next off the blocks is a blemish pre-grade unit for Batlow Coop in Batlow, NSW, currently being manufactured by Compac and scheduled for installation in time for the coming season.

Compac's Phil Prior says it is relatively easily to install the company's blemish pre-grader into an existing line, rather than as a two-stage packing process,



with a corresponding improvement in staffing, sorting efficiency, fruit handling and shed capacity.

John Paynter, packing in New Zealand under the Yummy brand, is an early convert to blemish pre-grading. His mantra is, "We want the right fruit in the right box in the right market on the right day".

Since installing Compac's pre-grader he's reduced staffing numbers in the sorting area and believes in the company's goal of packing superior product through using electronics to see the fruit before human eyes light on it.

"By the time it gets to our people (and they're good people) it's already gone through an electronic cut so people are seeing fruit that has been pre-sized, colour graded and blemish checked."

"It's changed the whole way we run the business," says Paynter. "Because we have more flexibility we are able to match marketing requirements very quickly. We've got a four lane pre-grader running with a high level of integrated mechanisation with a low level of staff to get the best results for business sustainability."

John Paynter regards the InVision 9000 as a very nice blend of modern construction and mechanical dependability.

As a well-travelled and knowledgeable operator, Paynter had the world's best equipment literally at his fingertips. "We were very happy with the plant we had and the service we got. When we looked around we realised that Compac is making more progress with new technology than anyone else in the market. Everyone talks-up their investment in new technology but our investigations showed that Compac is at the front of the pack, if not well ahead."

Also in New Zealand, Hawkes Bay's Longview Packing is undergoing a major re-design to become a showpiece site for fruit packing design that will incorporate the latest blemish-sorting technology to the shed's apple crop sorting, weighing and packing processes.

Longview is the first site in the country to plan and install a new equipment layout design to make the most of Compac's blemish sorting technology.

The new layout includes Compac's grading, sorting, sizing, and packing technology as well as the company's latest infra-red camera technology enabling fruit to be accurately sorted according to blemish and defects.

Michael Caccioppoli of Longview Packing is looking forward to the advantages of the new facility. He says the company worked alongside Compac to design a facility based on years of combined practical experience as well as looking to meet the changing environment of the industry in the future.

"What it will mean is that we have another means to remain competitive through this tough time in the market," he says, adding that the new layout and technology will also give Longview Packing, and the exporters that pack through the facility, a considerable advantage over the conventional packer-exporter groups with its flexibility.

Mr Prior says that despite a global downturn in the apple industry, Compac is seeing interest in its blemish grading for apples remaining strong as packers search for solutions to save costs and add efficiency to their facilities.

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