

BIG EFFICIENCY GAINS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

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Clever innovation is quietly working away in Australian packhouses and the leading edge technology is paying dividends in efficiency and profits.

Stonefruit packers in Victoria and South Australia report they are enjoying more throughput coupled with greater accuracy from the sorting, sizing and packing technology developed and manufactured by Compac Sorting Equipment

Frank Maiuto at Mumford Packing – one of three large packhouses in Woorinen North - says the ability to push through high volumes at speed is crucial to his business. He made the decision to install a new two lane Compac machine before last season after watching Compac sizers operate over the past three to four years. When asked about his Compac, Frank reports he is getting what he calls 'impressive performance.'

While Mumford Packing is a relative newcomer to the Compac stable, VF Siciliano & Sons packhouse has been running peaches and nectarines on a two-lane Compac unit since 1999. In 2001, they increased their sorting capacity with a single lane machine to improve flexibility.

"The upgrade was necessary to cope with other lines (such as apricots and plums) and avoid having to stop for smaller runs," says Fred Siciliano. "It also means we've got extra horsepower when we're busy."

Mr Siciliano says constant upgrading is an on-going process for the 48 year old company, which began packing grapes and vegetables and moved into stone fruit around 16 years ago.

James Flocchini, of Compac Sorting Equipment, says "while each packhouse takes a slightly different approach to how they want to pack, a key similarity is the desire for increased efficiencies. Compac Sorting Equipment has worked closely with VF Siciliano & Son, Mumford Packing as well as Cutri Packing, located between the two, N & P De Maio & Co of Cobram and more than 60 other customers in Australia to meet their individual needs and provide Compac's leading technology."

Mr Flocchini says one area that was evaluated for Siciliano, Mumford and Curtri was the changeover times required for different packaging. One advantage of a Compac sizer design is the easy change-over between tray packing to volume filling and vice versa as this takes much longer than making the program change on the computer.

"Because of the way in which packaging is supplied through the system, there is minimal time required to remove packaging of one type and insert another type," he says. "This goes back to our R&D team's effective design, which has a goal to maximise the number of packages packed hour to hour."

Compac technology is developed and refined through a partnership of in-house design teams and input from customers. A key component comes from listening to packers' priorities; in general focussed around making packing faster, gentler, quieter, more dependable, and more intelligent.

Flocchini explains how flexibility of design is important to suit an individual packhouse's own operations. "At Siciliano's, our designs are flexible enough to suit their individual needs of large and short runs. On the multi-lane machine, most grade sorting is completed prior to the Compac and the sizer controls the filling of each 10kg carton.

"However, on the single lane machine they do less sorting on the grading tables and so we have provided a system which allows a final inspection before fruit is filled into volume fill cartons and trays. Last year we introduced Compac Display Modules (CDM 's) that allow packers to program in a target fill weight for volume fill cartons.

"The packer places an empty carton below a manually or pneumatically operated door, pushes a 'tare button' that tares out the empty carton weight and opens the door allowing fruit to volume fill into the carton. When the target weight is reached the door automatically closes and the packer can check to make sure the correct weight is in the carton, adding or removing a piece or two. The packer then removes the full carton and places a new empty in its place to start the next filling process," he says.

"If, during the filling process, the packer finds any unacceptable fruit for the pack, it can easily be placed on a rejects conveyor. From an ergonomic viewpoint, what Compac does is to maximise the efficiency of this filling process to make sure that empty cartons are easily accessible, that the packer has a minimum of movements to complete when filling a carton and the full cartons can easily be cleared away."

Frank Maiuto says that, one season later, the new Compac system is proving to be a bonus for the packhouse. "We'd seen it in action on other sites, so we knew what to expect and have been very pleased, but for us, the after-sales service was an important component."

And in the Siciliano packhouse, business is getting bigger and faster, with yet more upgrades and improvements in the pipeline.

Flocchini says flexibility in innovation is not restricted to the installation itself. "We work closely with our customers to help them determine which options are best for their individual installation. Whether it is Compac technology itself, the layout of a Compac sizer, or a collaboration with other suppliers to provide a complete turnkey operation."

Compac systems are installed in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, throughout Europe, Korea, southern and northern Africa and the Middle East.

For more information:

James Flocchini, Compac Sorting Equipment, 0061 409 314 172