



How packhouse and sales solutions helped New Zealand's largest citrus packer and marketer grow the world's food basket.

New Zealand's largest citrus packer, NZ Fruits Limited, was founded as NZ Fruits Kiwi Products at Gisborne on the North Island in 1984. The development of the packhouse, then primarily a kiwifruit packing facility, was undertaken by business partners Fred Lewis and Bill Thorpe. Mr Thorpe established First Fresh NZ Limited, a standalone marketing company, in 1988.

A logical expansion into packing citrus followed and, in 1995, NZ Fruits began operating as a true multi-crop packing facility. While ownership and structure of both companies has changed, today NZ Fruits annually packs 5,500 tonnes of kiwifruit, 11,000 tonnes of citrus and 1,500 tonnes of persimmons – all produced by some 130 growers in the region. Persimmons and citrus lines including oranges, lemons, limes, grapefruit, tangelos and mandarins are procured and marketed by First Fresh which operates on the same premises and has a 10 per cent share in the packing company. Currently, 60 per cent of citrus is supplied to the domestic market with the remaining 40 per cent exported, primarily to Japan, the United States and China.



The catalyst for change

In 2015, in response to evolving customer and industry requirements, NZ Fruits and First Fresh sought to upgrade their respective packing and sales software systems.

The objective was to improve traceability and production efficiencies, boost sales and enhance integration between the businesses. The move to direct supermarket supply also created the need to upgrade.

Radfords Software implemented a packhouse system based on FreshPack Multi at NZ Fruits and a sales system, FreshSales at First Fresh.

Within a year, both businesses had achieved significant, measurable efficiencies and were better than ever positioned to set new benchmarks and realise expansion plans. These included a reconfiguration and addition of new fruit processing lines that will double the packhouse's capacity by the end of 2019.



NZ Fruits' managing director David Fox

A solution keeping pace with growth

NZ Fruits' implementation of Radfords' sophisticated and market-leading packhouse system – FreshPack Multi – has reinforced its standing as New Zealand's leading citrus packer.

With a state-of-the-art packhouse spanning 5,000 square metres and a solid grower base forged over three decades, a robust and transparent packhouse solution had become critical. For managing director David Fox and systems manager Maria Jukes, it was essential to keep pace with ever-tightening compliance requirements and increasing customer complexities around pack types and brands.

"We'd been using a bespoke system created for the original owners in 1986 and, while it was reliable and functional, it required manual and time-consuming data

entry. Handwritten documentation no longer stacks up in an industry which has stringent food safety standards and demands full traceability," systems manager Maria Jukes says.

"It was time to move to a live, electronic, more transparent solution which gave us greater autonomy."

"We wanted to minimise change and improve efficiencies. We wanted to trace fruit from the source with a system that could accommodate what and how we packed so if we did extra processing or pre-packing, we could react better to market forces and fluctuations."

Within a year of FreshPack Multi's installation, the packhouse had reaped significant gains in all areas.

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NZ Fruits' systems manager
Maria Jukes

Choosing Radfords

For NZ Fruits, Radfords Software was a known quantity with considerable, proven history.

"We were already familiar with Radfords because we use FreshPack Kiwi for kiwifruit. We were ready for change and were excited about what we would be able to do," Ms Jukes says.

"During scoping, Radfords spent time observing how we worked, giving employees a lot of input. That empowered employees to help shape productive change in their workplace. Radfords was extremely accommodating in factoring staff suggestions into FreshPack Multi. As a result, the impact of change has been minimal because it fitted our existing physical processes.

"Now the first full season is behind us, we're at the stage where we can suggest tweaks and ways to fine tune the system and we know Radfords will help us get the best out of it."

Benefits include time savings, accuracy

NZ Fruits' packhouse has 70 full time employees swelling to about 300 during the citrus harvest season between March and October when it operates two shifts a day, six days a week. Since FreshPack Multi's introduction, time savings have enabled the widespread reallocation of employees to higher value jobs.

"With a full track and trace system, time savings and accuracy are among the major benefits. We're making better use of people who have taken on more responsibility and can focus on quality and accuracy," Ms Jukes says.

"We can now create a planting allocation, match a block to a grower, print out bin cards prior to picking and apply market restrictions (relevant for export). We had no ability to do that electronically before. This saves duplication of pre-printed bin cards, reduces errors and frees a person for half a day.

"Now, when receiving bins, forklift drivers can do their jobs much faster as unloading times have decreased from 15-20 minutes per truck to 5-10 minutes. Trucks previously waited in line for up to 30 minutes. These waiting times have been eliminated."

"Real-time label printing for crates and cartons has been a game-changer. Previously changes and upgrades had to be created as a patch, then uploaded into the old software. This was not only inefficient but also created supply bottlenecks for First Fresh as the changes were often required for products for immediate supply."

Other improvements include the capability to EDI files to service providers such as transport operators for immediate download and use in their own system.



Marketing embraces FreshSales

First Fresh had three reliable yet disparate software systems, two of which had been introduced and bolted onto the same 30-year-old bespoke system used by NZ Fruits. Whilst this functioned, it was becoming increasingly obsolete and inefficient.

First Fresh managing director Ian Albers says three separate systems for sales, exports and grower payments had to communicate effectively.

"We needed a one-stop-shop solution to improve the way we ran the business and to position us for growth," he says.

"Like NZ Fruits, we needed to be more robust to meet customer requirements. Our previous systems used outdated database technology which made it increasingly hard to do our job. Traceability was rudimentary. It was like hammering in a nail with a sledge hammer.

"We considered three options – upgrading the incumbent system to a new platform, adopting existing Radfords' technology or using another off-the-shelf product from overseas. We already knew Radfords through their involvement with NZ Fruits and being geographically close to Gisborne was an added bonus.



First Fresh managing director Ian Albers

Because NZ Fruits was also looking to upgrade, it was a golden opportunity for us to do both at once.

"FreshSales is a seamless system with everything in one database. Data entry is simple and fast. We can take a customer's order today, use that to create an order template and, then tomorrow, if that customer orders again, just change the date and quantity. Not having to start an order from scratch has been a huge time saver for the product managers. Another area where we have saved a lot of time is in reporting and information management. We no longer have to extract information to a CSV file, import it into Excel, create the separate spreadsheet with pivot tables and then use the information. Now, all of this reporting functionality, including the use of pivot tables, is built right into the FreshSales program. My estimate is this saves the sales and marketing team at least an hour per person per day.

"One of the points of difference to our competitors is that we pay growers for what we pack, not what we sell. Radfords designed a bespoke grower payments add-on function to handle this arrangement. Added six months after roll-out in 2016, the grower payments system has probably saved four product managers three to four hours each a fortnight, giving them more time to spend talking to growers and customers."

"Efficiencies have also been gained for transport company, Mainfreight. As we now send consignment data to Mainfreight, there is no need for manual data entry."

A smooth transition

FreshPack Multi and FreshSales were implemented on November 1, 2016 so the software could be well embedded and tested whilst season product flows were at their lowest levels and ensure that all of the potential kinks had been ironed out before the new season started in March 2017. The Radfords team was on hand and on site for the better part of a week to help.

In the packhouse, Ms Jukes says the requirement to manually transfer and extract information created in the old system increased the risk of errors and inaccuracies and eliminating this risk proved the decision to change was the right one.

"FreshPack Multi is 100 per cent reliable, user friendly and with full traceability, our business is smarter than ever."

"At First Fresh, the actual go-live of the FreshSales system only took about an hour. However, that was after many hours of getting the background data set up and tested before then. Day one, and at least all the produce went out the door with the right documentation. It wasn't perfect but we knew that if we could achieve that, then fine-tuning would only improve things. After a couple of weeks and some staff training, everyone was adept at using it. We were ready for the change," Mr Albers says.



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Some efficiencies at a glance

FreshPack Multi

DATA ENTRY

1 full-time job reallocated

LABEL DESIGN AND PRINTING

1-2 days saved per design change

FRUIT RECEIVAL

Loading dock bottlenecks halved
Unloading time halved

FreshSales

DATA ENTRY

1 hour saved per day

GROWER PAYMENTS

16 hours saved per fortnight

INVOICING

1-2 hours saved per week



A solid relationship driven by growth

For both NZ Fruits and First Fresh, a working knowledge of Radfords' systems has delivered a new confidence.

Ms Jukes says the first year was spent bedding down the system. "Now we can fine-tune and realise extras such as a cold chain management. Add-ons since roll-out include linking FreshPack Multi to customer software, a bespoke invoicing component, integration to a finance package and a feature to help quality managers carry out phytosanitary requirements for export."

Both businesses say Radfords' support has been outstanding.

"As our knowledge grows, the relationship has changed from seeking support to developing enhancements and upgrades such as a recent module for managing foreign exchange rates on export transactions. The other main area now that we have more than 12 months of data is to produce month-by-month comparisons, analyse data and improve decision-making. The next goal is to improve reporting to growers on returns and start benchmarking grower and customer performance.

"By eliminating paperwork, we have eliminated the risk of errors. In this industry, it's critical that our customers can rely on the accuracy and timeliness of our information," Mr Albers says.



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Grow the world's food basket

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