

ABC system puts grape operation ahead of the competition

AN ABC SOFTWARE CUSTOM-DESIGNED PACKING AND TRACEABILITY (PAT) SYSTEM FOR A MAJOR TABLE GRAPE OPERATION IN VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA, IS DELIVERING HUGE BENEFITS.

Each year *Seven Fields' Treviso estate* in Mildura harvests more than 300,000 boxes of three different grape varieties from up to six farms.

The PAT system manages the grapes from vineyard to market, using a unique bar-code sticker assigned to each picker. A sticker is placed on each box of grapes in the vineyard by the picker, and scanned as the boxes are brought into the central pack house. The grapes spend about 24 hours in the cool store and the boxes are re-scanned as they leave for markets.

Produce Marketing Manager, Clare McMahon, says traceability of the returns from each box of grapes is vital. "We own some of the grapes, some are owned by investors whose investments we manage, and some are owned by our joint venture partner.

"Because the grapes are packed directly into boxes by the pickers, it's extremely important for our investors that we're able to trace the returns for each box back to the grower. ABC has enabled us to guarantee that traceability.

"Our previous, manual, paper-based system, although accurate, took a lot of time, was very messy, and involved a lot of paper work.

"The PAT system, also enables us to get on-the-spot reports whenever we like. This means that we can provide reports to our seven contractors specifying what each picker picked. Our accountants can also quickly see the returns that should be allocated to each investor. Previously, we only reported that information at the end of the season."

Up to 90% of *Seven Fields'* grapes is exported.

"Being able to trace a single box back to a particular day, block of land and picker using the PAT barcode is great when we have to deal with claims," says Clare.

"It tells me if fruit's been held on to for too long when it's landed in a market or if cartons that have problems have been picked by the same picker or from the same block. It's put us ahead of our competition and enabled us to give better assurances to our customers."

Asset Manager, Simon Campbell, says the wireless PAT system has also made the pack house more efficient because grapes no longer have to be physically separated by owner in the cool store to keep track of ownership.

"It's also been great for our quality management and we're definitely picking up more problems before the product hits the market than we were before.

"If we receive a box that's too light, we can deal with it as soon as the grapes are delivered to the pack-house and get a message back to the picker immediately."

Simon says the pickers like the new system as well. "Our previous system meant we could only trace a problem box back to a block of land where there might be 100 pickers, so everyone from that block would be docked the cost of fixing the problem. But the PAT system means that we can now charge the cost back to a specific picker."

Clare says she looked at a number of systems and chose ABC because it was able to be customised to *Seven Fields'* needs. "You don't have to go overboard; you only build the system that you need. They also had a very good understanding of how our business works and were so enthusiastic.

"Sharon's got a way of really drawing information out of you to work out what you need, and on the operational side, Julie was fantastic – we just seemed to be on the same page. I know that we made the right decision choosing ABC."

Clare McMahon – Produce Marketing Manager

Simon Campbell – Asset Manager

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