

# AVOCADOES THROUGH THE ROOF

## Giant shed opens in WA

THREE Western Australian families have combined to build one of Australia's biggest avocado packing sheds south of Perth.

The facility at its peak is expected to pack 50% of WA's avocado crop. It has been largely built from the hard toil and ingenuity of the Francheschi, French and Ipsen families.

The operation put through its first fruit in October last year with estimates of initial throughput at 480,000 trays a year growing to 1.6 million trays within three years.

One of the project's leaders, Wayne Francheschi, said the packing shed at Manjimup had taken six months to complete, mostly at the hands of family members.

"The office and staff amenities block was done by the builder, but the packing shed itself we did," he said. After selling his own

orchard and packing shed several years ago, Mr Francheschi took up the offer of a vacant shed and set about packing avocados for local growers.

The business soon grew to urgently need more space, so the concept of today's massive facility was born. Inside the shed, a Compac dual twin-lane sizer packs and grades about 2500 trays an hour, employing up to 30 people for six months of the year.

Mr Francheschi said their company, Advance Packing and Marketing Services (APMS), was up and running "after a couple of false starts". "Although the weather hasn't been kind, we've managed the fine tuning and the first consignments without

any major problems," he said.

Mr Francheschi is also proud of the company's green credentials, with minimal waste. He said cardboard was mulched and returned to the orchards, plastic wrap was offered to recyclers and the 1% of reject fruit was pulped. Avocado oil, a by-product of the reject fruit was used primarily in skincare products and soaps.

Little wash water was required with only light dust and some flower litter to be removed, he said.

APMS uses the latest high-tech product-tracking software. ABC Software was contracted to build the tailor-made package that tracks batches of fruit from shed entry through to the consumer. It allows for trace-back of fruit right to the block or row within an orchard.

Growing and packaging is just one end of the process. Timely and efficient transport is a critical link in the chain. In most cases, growers transport their own fruit from the

orchard to the packing shed.

From the shed to the Perth markets or railhead, APMS relies on Warren District Transport.

Mr Francheschi said he could rely on having the transport on time, every time. "In fact, they are usually early," he said. WDT runs one road train a day from October to March for APMS. Mr Francheschi reckons he will soon need four a day.

Avocados, from seedling to consumer, are his world. Wayne Francheschi has a hand in production of more than 250 hectares of avocados from 30 growers in Western Australia's southern horticultural region.

The chair of the Avocado Growers Association of Western Australia, Mr Francheschi has had more than 20 years experience in the industry.

His wife Jennie has an association with avocados dating from 1974, when her family's orchard was the first commercial avocado orchard planted in WA.

The Francheschis moved to Pemberton in 1987 and continued in the industry.

Mrs Francheschi is the current Western Australian director on the board of Avocados Australia

