

Labour tracking software transformative for berry operation

MOVING TO ABCGROWER SOFTWARE HAS TRANSFORMED DATA RECORDING FOR SMART BERRIES, ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S LARGEST BERRY GROWERS. THERE'S NO LONGER ANY NEED TO DOUBLE HANDLE 16,000+ DATA ENTRIES EVERY DAY, WHICH MEANS STAFF ARE FREED UP TO BE MORE PRODUCTIVE AND REAL TIME INFORMATION HAS RESULTED IN GREATER EFFICIENCY ALL ROUND.

Sally Jolly is Smart Berries' Agronomist and Assistant Farm Manager of the 100ha berry farm in Mundubbera, Queensland, which grows multiple berry varieties and at peak season, employs around 400 pickers.

She said her life changed when the horticultural specialist software was introduced to the business in July 2018.

"I'd been looking for an alternative to the system we were running that essentially wasn't working for us. I was keen to work with ABC Software to trial the system to see if it would be better. I could see the benefit before we even officially got started. We got real time data that very quickly showed us how fast people were working. It made day to day forecasting much much easier."

Some of Sally's initial concerns – dead spots on the farm with no internet access, the best type of scanner, ease of use by pickers – were all dealt with effectively and during the first year of use, operational hiccups were fixed speedily.

"There were some initial growing pains as we got more confident in what we needed to do to make it work best for us. For instance, we needed to choose the right people to operate the scanners because everything was sped up and people needed to keep up.

"It didn't take long for the pickers to get the hang of the system. They could see the benefit too, there was reduced miscounting of buckets and disputes over pick rates as each picker has their own barcode that is scanned.

"Being able to see how fast individuals are picking in real time means we can design teams to be more uniform in their picking rates. We can add in team members with better skills to show others how to improve and bring up the team if need be. And it's fairer for the piece rate pickers, as the faster teams had to be moved to new blocks and lost that time, so keeping teams working through a block at an even rate is now feasible.

"It's made our harvest management of blocks so much more effective. And to be honest, I didn't anticipate how important the team dynamic is in harvest management. Being able to really understand how individuals contribute to team productivity."

It's not just in the field that the ABC's software is proving its worth. "It's made things heaps easier in the office," says Sally. "A life saver is how it's been described."

With the previous manual system, time sheets were inputted manually and pay rates calculated laboriously, a two-person process that is no longer necessary. Instead, payroll information is sent to head office or to contractors at the click of a button.

It's our job to make yours easier.

"We now have time to crunch the numbers and do some analytical scrutiny. It's made us far more efficient in what we do. We can filter out information every possible way now. ABC understood exactly what we needed to do."

Smart Berries also utilises ABCgrower for its non-picking activities – Capex, Opex, general management, for the driving, pruning, planting, and spray teams' activities. "We're able to group together multiple work crews, it's saving a lot of time."

"ABCgrower has been a worthwhile investment absolutely, no doubt about it," says Sally.

Spray diary software streamlining process and saving time

WHEN SMART BERRIES' AGRONOMIST SALLY JOLLY HEARD THAT ABCGROWER WAS TO HAVE A SPRAY DIARY MODULE ADDED, SHE LEAPT AT THE CHANCE TO ADD HER INPUT INTO HOW IT COULD HELP THE ALMOST-DAILY SPRAY PROGRAMME SHE PLANS FOR TWO OPERATORS.

"We're a big enterprise and the spray requirements and spray records to keep on top of adds up," says Sally.

Right from the outset, Sally says she was impressed at how easy the spray diary was to set up and tailor for Smart Berries' multiple berry varieties.

"I've been able to set it up to suit us specifically. There was no noise you don't need. It's easy to change, to delete and unlike our previous system, the search function has been a real game changer. We can simply search by block, chemical, active, or any other filter and we can see what was applied and when. It's a huge time saver.

"It's also brilliant that it calculates rates automatically, water rates, nozzles, activates the lot, one click and it's all there. And it allows us to easily spray different blocks, or split blocks, that need the same formula of inputs without impacting workers in the field.

"I always felt I needed to triple check everything, now I double check but it's much clearer and there are less mistakes made in the field, as the instructions are right in front of our spray operators. I still provide a hard copy, but the guys have phones so can check out the app for all the info. We're developing the confidence to move away from paper.

"I like that it flies the same structure as ABCgrower. It's really easy to learn and the fact that I was able to teach others to use it over the phone while I was away, speaks for itself."

Smart Berries started using the spray diary in March 2020 as part of the module's testing phase. Sally worked with ABC Software to "iron out the kinks" to make sure the module would do what was needed. "Any kinks were sorted out really quickly."

"It's been great to be part of the testing process. I'm really impressed with how user friendly it is."

Sally Jolly
SMART BERRIES