RADFORDS

Developing an integrated packhouse software solution to support the growth strategy of a leading Australian fruit producer and farming innovator.

Piñata Farms was seeking a fully integrated system which provided seamless functionality from harvest to dispatch across all sites

Australia's Piñata Farms Pty Ltd produces three fruit lines in five states for domestic and export consumption. Piñata Farms is Australia's largest pineapple producer, among the largest strawberry producers and holds the exclusive breeding rights to grow specialty mangoes. The Queensland-based operation has some 1,010 hectares under cultivation nationally and produces more than 1.5 million trays of fruit annually. Since implementing FreshPack Multi in 2015, the business continues to set new benchmarks for packhouse and produce business performance.

Working smarter, not harder.

"All our objectives have been met or exceeded."

While Piñata Farms' previous system could manage the packhouse function, sales reporting was complex. Operational knowledge was restricted to a few key personnel outside the shop floor.

Piñata Farms was seeking a fully integrated system which provided seamless functionality from harvest to dispatch across all sites including the central packhouse at Wamuran, south-east Queensland and other farm sites including Mareeba in Far North Queensland, Stanthorpe in southern Queensland and Darwin in the Northern Territory.

FreshPack Multi's standard software ticked all the boxes.

"We wanted a system which could tell us accurately and simply how many trays are created, where they go, how much is sold, what the respective costs are for transport, labour and packing and how much fruit loss is incurred, if any. The identification

and surety of information means we can provide more reliable information to customers.

"Specifically, we wanted to improve shop floor efficiency, sales opportunities, inventory processes and provide better summary and seasonal reports to improve relations with growers and customers.

"With business growth projected and the introduction of new fruit lines on the horizon, we needed a robust system which could supply comprehensive information simply – a system which could connect all areas of the business and track produce as it moves along the supply chain. It also needed to closely match core processes with existing processes to minimise the impact of change.

"All our objectives have been met or exceeded."

Piñata Farms, boosted productivity as the first Australian fresh produce company to implement a Radfords Software system.

The move yielded measurable operational efficiencies and recouped investment in the system within a year (with ease).

Piñata Farms' general manager, Roger Turner says the benefits of implementing FreshPack Multi have been significant and many.

"The system has revolutionised packhouse and business operations and delivered measurable efficiencies.

With multiple sites spread across two states, our farming operation is better equipped than ever to accelerate growth and explore new frontiers," he says.

"With Radfords, it doesn't matter how many sites we have now or in the future. The principles of the software are the same. We can add as many sites or fruit lines as we like."

PIÑATA FARMS GENERAL MANAGER, ROGER TURNER

A system delivering outcomes

Mr Turner says Piñata Farms now has an intuitive system which has handed accountability back to the shop floor – a fundamental objective for any manufacturing process. It has also empowered staff with the tools to improve productivity, problem solving and decision-making.

"Sales reporting is instant and straightforward. The system allows us to spread knowledge across the shop floor.

Previously, staff operated automatically, without the deep knowledge or confidence to question procedures.

"There had to be a better way to manage daily transactions which took half a day to run and hours to decipher. Because only a few people knew how to interpret results, it created bottlenecks in the communication chain. With FreshPack, access in just a few clicks means anyone at any farm can access information how and when they want, without having to rely on others to provide timely information.

"The system has released capability throughout the business by removing the mundane so people can focus on areas that add value. We are better placed to identify individual abilities, train people in new areas and reallocate resources according to skills. It has made everyone's job easier and more enjoyable and given them a better understanding of targets."

Mr Turner says the system enables packers on the pineapple line to receive their own fruit, create their own run and record the number of hours and people required to fulfill orders – something which could not be done previously.

FreshPack has achieved a key improvement in stock control during mango season.

While pineapples and strawberries are picked, packed and despatched on the same day, mangoes are held for up to six days and ripened on site before being sold. It is critical during this period that trays are tracked and ripening stages recorded.

"FreshPack allows us to accurately keep track of mangoes while they are rotated. As different batches ripen at different times, it's critical to know where every tray is and to record ripening stages. This helps us manage waste, reduce the potential for mistakes and achieve optimal sales results.

"The first mango season came a month after roll-out. Stock control improved significantly with between five and 10 per cent more sold for a premium price. By the second season (2016-2017) every pallet of fruit achieved the best possible price.

"The system can't influence the way we grow or handle produce. But it helps us deal better with seasonal issues and bridge the reporting gap to growers. If a grower wants to know exactly where and when their mangoes have been distributed, we can tell them."

Why Radfords Software?

Piñata Farms' managing director Gavin Scurr discovered Radfords Software at an industry trade show. Nothing in Australia measured up.

"Firstly, the provider had to understand the horticultural industry, its peculiarities, seasonal pressures and the challenges required to meet industry standards. The product had to be logical, user friendly and intuitive. Finally, the business that developed and supported the software had to be well established with a solid business structure to deal with our growth and theirs – beyond an operation that relied on one or two key individuals," Mr Scurr says.

Roger Turner's fact-finding visit to Radfords in New Zealand was promising from the outset.

"As soon as I walked in, I could see the size of the business was clearly corporate. That was the first indication we were on the right path. Individuals responsible for various components of the software were brought in to the owner's office to explain how each component worked. That demonstrated there was a depth to the business and that the expertise was spread – it was a masterstroke," Mr Turner says.

"We visited Radfords' customers throughout New Zealand. Seeing how the software was being applied in the real world was critical to our decision-making."

Then the Radfords Software team visited Piñata Farms.

"The team was with us for a week. From the outset they understood we needed a system with the capacity to handle three lines (two with seasonal fluctuations) and variable fruit sizes. The approach was 'if the system can't do it now, we'll make it happen' because if a customisation works for Piñata Farms, it will work for others.

PIÑATA FARMS MANAGING DIRECTOR,
GAVIN SCURR

"Radfords reviewed our pooling process for paying third party mango growers and immediately identified ways to improve it. The solution allows us to pool payment information quickly with a few button pushes.

"Separately, we incorporated growers' own software functionality into our system to streamline the information flow. This means we can speed up label scanning when goods arrive.

With 2,560 individual labels requiring individual scanning with every truck load, it was laborious. Now, a consignment is scanned just once on arrival, saving hours of work."

Piñata Farms already had solid traceability systems in place. However, the Radfords system means all fruit can now be traced back to its block of origin with more authority.
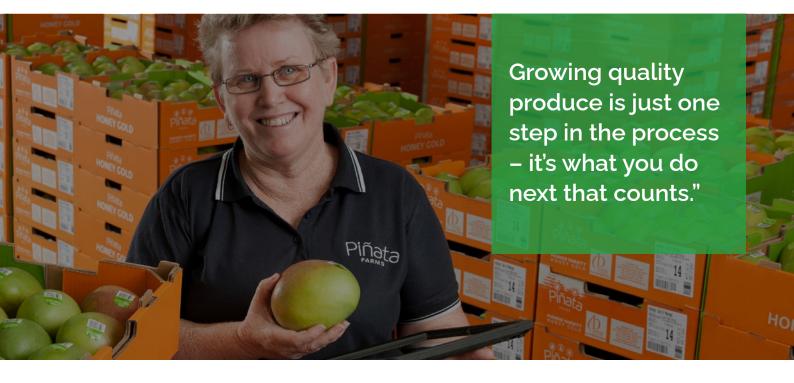
"The system was rolled out seamlessly.

There was no phase-in period, we came to work and switched it on. It didn't miss a beat," Mr Turner says.

"We specifically requested go live for October – after strawberry season and before mango season – when only pineapples were being handled.

"The team remained on site for a week, testing and tweaking but really, it was business as usual from day one. Most training was conducted when the system was live, so people could understand how it worked in real time. People adapted rapidly and were excited that their jobs were made easier.

"The system operates off Piñata Farms' server and the load is moderate. We can operate it from a mobile phone or any number of devices on site or remotely. If support is required, it's available during our business hours."

RADFORDS

> Growing quality produce is just one step in the process – it's what you do next that counts."

Partnering for the future

Since implementation, Radfords Software and Piñata Farms have continued to work closely, identifying and making dozens of small modifications in the quest for continual improvement.

"The more the system does and the more we understand its potential, the more we want it to do. FreshPack has the capability and flexibility to be stretched which places us in an ideal position for the next 10 to 15 years.

"We measure the success of the system by how easy it is to use. We're always looking for new benchmarks in fruit production and if there's a system which helps us achieve that, we embrace it. Growing quality produce is just one step in the process – it's what you do next that counts."

Efficiencies at a glance

SALES REPORTING
1.5 days saved per month

GROWER PAYMENTS
Pooling payment integrated

ACCESS
Remote or on site

MANGO SEASON 2016-2017
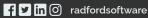### 100% premium sales

MANGOES
2,560 labels per consignment scanned instantly
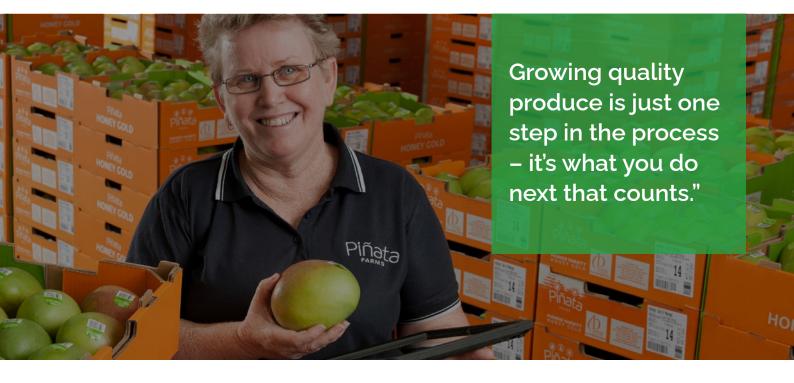
PINEAPPLES
Yield, plant performance enhanced

STRAWBERRIES
Block of origin traceability improved

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