

Flavourfresh Salads Hunger for change

“*Flavourfresh estimates that the new system will reduce product waste from 8% - to 5% on some varieties, and access to live data will give management constant oversight of its stock and enable it to make quicker sales decisions.*”

A food producer's ambition to use data and systems integration to increase production and reduce waste has accelerated by three years using Made Smarter support and advice.

Flavourfresh Salads, based in Southport, has introduced a highly scientific system to produce data from pick to pack for tomatoes and soft fruit.

The current system relies on paper-based processes and lacks accurate live data about the quantity and quality of its produce.

Made Smarter has helped Flavourfresh invest in a fully integrated harvested yield and quality control system, capturing and analysing data from greenhouse all the way through to dispatch, and giving the business real-time oversight.

The solution is forecast to improve operator productivity and reduce waste by three per cent.

Charmay Prout, managing director, said: *“We are a highly technical and scientific business and we want to push the boundaries of data, analytics and automation in our sector and attract a workforce with those skill sets.”*

“We’ve developed an ambitious and innovative plan to digitalise our production and processes, with the help of Made Smarter we’ve been able to accelerate the start of this journey.”

The Challenge

Founded in 1997 by three growers, the business has developed from growing premium tomatoes into soft fruits like strawberries, blackberries, raspberries and blueberries.

The £18m turnover business employs around 180 people all year round and relies upon 80 seasonal workers, many from abroad, for harvesting and packing the produce.

While the business has invested in glass houses and infrastructure, it has now set its sights on efficiency and speeding up processes.

“We are a business that works within such fine margins so data such as quantity, quality and waste is really important and can be the difference between if we have a successful year or not,” Charmay said. “We still rely on paper-based systems and there are too many jobs being duplicated and triplicated which can result in inaccuracies.”

“We recognise we aren’t getting the right information when we need it so we can’t make decisions we need to on productivity, efficiency and waste.”

The Solution

Using support and advice from Made Smarter, Flavourfresh is introducing a manufacturing execution system which connects, monitors and controls key data from Greenhouse Harvesting, Goods Intake, Quality Control, Stock movements to production, Scanning/issuing to packing lines, Stock Returns, and Finished Goods/Dispatch.

The digitalisation and integration of the processes will take the business to the next level allowing customers to track their orders and shipments.

A key part of the solution is Marco Trac-IT Yield Control software which is installed on packing lines. This introduces weight controls and a traffic light system to ensure consistency in packing.

Live packing line performance will give managers full visibility of batch progress and finish time per product, and operator performance.

Meanwhile, data analytics will give Flavourfresh insight into yield, waste and second-class products by variety and which greenhouse and picker it came from.

The solution also includes QCM, a tablet-based system aimed at removing all paperwork associated with quality checks from the nursery to packhouse goods intake through to dispatch.

All information is recorded electronically, and label checks are captured with photographic evidence which is archived in a database.

The Benefits

Data captured and analysed through the new system will give Flavourfresh greater accuracy in harvest volumes and forecasts which will enable the business to better plan production and factory throughput, resulting in reduced labour, down time and wastage.

The new simpler, quicker packing solution is forecast to increase operator productivity.

Replacing a minimum weight paper based system, to an average weight process, which will almost eradicate product giveaway and produce consistent packs.

“Consumers often root through packs to look for the one that looks like better value,” Charmay said. “If you ensure pack consistency the product will be better presented which is what our customers demand.”



Having accurate and real time access to product waste data, Flavourfresh will be able to quickly pinpoint which varieties or locations are causing concern and put measures in place to reduce it.

Flavourfresh estimates that the new system will reduce product waste from 8% - to 5% on some varieties.

Access to live data will give management constant oversight of its stock and enable it to make quicker sales decisions.

The new quality control systems will give staff more time to do more visual checks, increasing the quality of the products.

The Future

Flavourfresh is exploring two further phases of its strategy over the coming years, using robotics and automation.

Charmay said: *“We are experiencing a decline in foreign workers coming back during harvest because of Brexit and exchange rates so we are concerned about availability of labour. This is driving us to explore robotics and automation.”*

By automating packing lines Flavourfresh believes it can redeploy staff to other areas of the business to combat availability issues. Another new area for the business could be introducing robotic pickers for harvesting.

