

Super future for avocados

It's super big, super efficient and a super initiative for avocado growers from southern to central Queensland.

Childers company, SuperPak, have officially opened their \$2.2 million packing facility and many Wide Bay Burnett avocado growers are excited at the prospect of giving away the labour intensive and costly job of packing their own fruit to reap the benefits of this ultra modern one-stop-shop facility.

General Manager Jim Carney, an avocado grower for 25 years and founder of SuperPak, is enthusiastic about the enterprise and its ability to be everything to everyone.

'This facility is all about labour and cost saving for growers, reliability for retailers and satisfaction for consumers,' he said.

Extensive research in 2007, lead by peak industry body Avocados Australia, concluded that a cohesive and consolidated packing and marketing effort was needed. Jim Carney took up the mantle, formed the grower-owned SuperPak and, after two years of planning and development, established this substantial regional packing enterprise in the heart of the avocado growing district of Queensland.

The SuperPak 'shed' is 2000 square metres and houses the most sophisticated and cutting edge equipment and technology.

'We searched worldwide for the best of everything to do with packing efficiency,' Carney said. 'We have a four-lane packing line with more than 100 automatic tray filling drops, automated top tray labelling for fruit stickers, an automated palletizing system and a comprehensive computer tracking system.'

'We live in a world where economy of scale is increasingly important. We can pack fruit faster, more accurately, more efficiently and more economically than most growers. Top that with significant cost saving at both ends of the supply chain, less fruit handling, exceptional quality control and professional marketing—it equals the complete deal.'

The local Childers community will benefit from employment generated by SuperPak.

'We'll have a core staff of 12, which will increase to around 30 with casual labour in the peak picking season,' Carney said.

'While the country is in the grip of an economic crisis, I don't expect there will be any appreciable negative impact on the agricultural industry,' he explained.

'People have to eat and, in fact, when they reduce the amount of expensive takeaway and restaurant food they buy, they increase the amount of fresh produce in their shopping basket.'

One of the small group of founding investors, premier avocado marketer and exporter Sunfresh Marketing Cooperative, will lend its considerable expertise to the business.

SuperPak expects to handle more than half a million trays of avocados, or nearly three million kilograms, in its first year of operation—a figure rapidly expected to grow as interest spreads and the export market gains momentum.

True to its objective to meet the needs of retailers and consumers, SuperPak is developing options for fruit retailers that includes pre-packaging and ‘ripe and ready’—where fruit is labelled with a guarantee to be ready to eat within a specified number of days.

‘Our vision is to be one of the major avocado suppliers in the country,’ Jim Carney says. ‘We have total faith that this is something the industry wants and needs, so we’ve built it and now we’ll begin to spread the word about the value of our complete solution.’

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