



Providing an intuitive, accurate packhouse solution to contribute to a fruit producer's success as Australian market share leader in two categories.



A reliable, accurate and easy to use packhouse software solution was essential for long-term growth.

Seeka Australia Pty Ltd was established in August 2015 when Australasia's largest kiwifruit producer and premium produce company, Seeka Limited of New Zealand, acquired the orchard and business assets of Bunbartha Fruit Packers. Now, Seeka Australia is Australia's largest kiwifruit and nashi pear producer. It also produces plums, apricots, cherries and European pears. The operation has some 250 hectares under cultivation in Victoria's Shepparton region, with another 30 hectares under development and additional land available for future expansion. Seeka Australia dispatches fruit nationally every day of the year, exports kiwifruit seasonally, and handles over 8,500 pallets of fruit a year.

Seeka Australia made its first significant investment in post-harvest infrastructure in late 2016, when it acquired Radfords Software's FreshPack Multi packhouse system. The move realised immediate production efficiencies and shored up growth projections.



A system customised for fruit

“FreshPack Multi has taken our business to another level”.

Seeka Australia has seven orchards, two packhouses and six external cool-store providers in Shepparton.

“The system we inherited was capable of managing the packhouse function but it was complex and understood by only a few people. What we wanted was something which used a fruit terminology that everyone – here and in New Zealand – could easily understand and use without prior knowledge or training,” Mr Donovan says.

“We process fruit 365 days of the year. On our busiest day, we can load up to 100 tonnes of fruit. In kiwifruit season alone, we could dispatch up to 60 pallets of fruit a day.

“All lines are cool-stored before distribution – varying from two days for cherries up to four weeks for kiwifruit.

“We need to accurately record the movement and rotation of six fruit categories and multiple varieties of each from harvest to distribution.

“What we pick has to match what is stored, sold and distributed. With all that, FreshPack Multi has taken our business to another level.

“We trust the accuracy of its data and have confidence in reporting it to our New Zealand operation.”

When Seeka Australia made the switch to Radfords, Seeka’s New Zealand division had already been associated with Radfords for 25 years.

“My own dealings with Radfords, over seven years working out of Asia, were also positive,” Mr Donovan says.

“We know the products are reliable, and that the team is quick to respond and can solve any problem. We also know that Radfords takes pride in its product, which instills enormous confidence in the user.”

As an early adopter of Radfords Software’s FreshPack Multi packhouse system, Seeka Australia’s acquisition is poised to drive change.

In Victoria’s Goulburn Valley region – where approximately 80 per cent of Australia’s fruit is produced – packhouse innovations are much sought after. As an early adopter of Radfords Software’s FreshPack Multi packhouse system, Seeka Australia’s acquisition is poised to drive change.

For Seeka Australia operations manager, Ryan Donovan, a reliable, accurate and easy to use packhouse software solution was essential for long-term growth.

“When we acquired Bunbartha Fruit Packers, the owners told us the packhouse system would need modernising. Initially, we updated the original system with a new version. After 12 months, we realised we needed to capture more reliable data in a more timely manner that everyone on the supply chain could access easily,” Mr Donovan says.



SEEKA AUSTRALIA OPERATIONS
MANAGER, RYAN DONOVAN

Offline scanning sets benchmarks

Packhouse manager, Greg Brown, says FreshPack Multi's standard system was installed with a specific customisation, now setting new benchmarks for inventory accuracy.

"Offline scanning allows Seeka Australia to scan fruit in the orchard before it arrives at the packhouse," Mr Brown says.

"With tablets throughout the packhouse to trace stock, there's no repetitive data entry or duplication, which means we have been able to reallocate staff accordingly."

"Harvested fruit can go to multiple packhouses so it's important to know what's on the truck before it leaves the orchard. Previously, someone had to manually count the number of bins and record it on paper. Now, the forklift operator or truck driver scans bins in the orchard using a hand scanner or tablet. The information is uploaded when the fruit arrives at the packhouse.

"We now have visibility of fruit from orchard to packhouse. The scanner doesn't lie. Bin numbers can't be disputed or miscounted. Offline scanning has eliminated human error. This has saved several hours a day. When data is reliable, you don't lose productivity time questioning it."



Reliable, efficient and straightforward cool-store management

Mr Donovan says a key objective was for a system that could record varying cool-store stages for each line in a straightforward manner.

"For kiwifruit, the system needs to accurately track the volume of fruit which sits under a canopy outside the packhouse for 48 hours while curing.

"Summer fruit lines may be packed and distributed immediately or stored in a Controlled Atmosphere (CA) environment to halt ripening until it's time to dispatch."

"As Seeka Australia produces approximately 90 per cent of Australia's kiwifruit and up to 95 per cent of the nation's nashi pears, it's a challenge for any system to keep abreast of so much information, yet FreshPack Multi handles it with ease," he says.

A smooth phase-in

Radfords software was phased in over two key stages in November, 2016. Go-live was selected to fall between the end of nashi pear season and the start of the summer fruit harvest.

"Implementation was seamless and there was no impact on production – another key objective. The first stage focused on inventory and packing and took about two days, the second focused on offline scanning and took one or two days. The Radfords' team was on site throughout go-live and there were no issues.

"They got it right from the outset."

Mr Donovan says that while several long-term employees were initially reluctant to embrace the new technology, they quickly adapted and it is now universally appreciated.

"Because our lines are seasonal, fruit changes throughout the year as do users of the system. As well as 19 full-time staff, we employ up to 250 seasonal workers. We need a user-friendly system that can adapt to a transitional workforce. To ensure productivity, our employees must be able to pick it up and run with it. If a system is complex, it takes time to train people. Our focus is on dispatching fruit, not training people."

Mr Donovan says communication has improved vastly throughout the Seeka Australia operation since roll-out, primarily between the orchards and packhouses.

"It has also eliminated frustration for our New Zealand operation which no longer has to wait for us to prepare and issue complicated sales reports which took about an hour a day. It's all there within a few clicks. The reliability of data has improved our accountability as an offshore division. In a multiple seasonal line operation with many variables, that's one less thing to worry about."



SEEKA AUSTRALIA PACKHOUSE MANAGER,
GREG BROWN

Label printing efficiencies: "We've saved up to four hours a day."

FreshPack Multi's online label printing functionality has achieved significant shop floor efficiencies.

"Previously, one employee took all day to print labels at a PC on the other side of the packhouse. Now, at the start of the day, we use tablets to input what label sizes are required and four printers output the labels automatically," Mr Donovan says.

"We have reallocated that employee to other jobs on the shop floor and, as labels are now scanned directly to pallets, we've saved up to four hours a day in manually counting pallets."

A flexible system adapts to needs:

"The system is nimble
enough to adapt to
the changing needs
of a fast-paced fruit
producer."

Within six months of implementation, Radfords Software collaborated with Seeka Australia to modify FreshPack Multi's order management component to streamline post-harvest processes.

"Instead of manually preparing that information – a laborious and complex task which could take one to two days a week – it's all collated instantly in a central location for easy access and download. It was a wish-list item we discussed from the outset but, as Seeka Australia started to gain momentum, it became essential," Mr Donovan says.

Since acquiring Bunbartha Fruit Packers, Seeka Australia has increased its packhouse footprint by some 58 per cent to 3,847 square metres over several stages in readiness for increased production over five years. The main assembly line also increased its capacity from handling 20,000 trays a day in 2016 to 30,000 in 2017.

"This is where Radfords' niche horticultural experience comes in. The system is nimble enough to adapt to the changing needs of a fast-paced fruit producer," he says.



“We look forward to Radfords being part of Seeka Australia’s journey.”

A strong relationship

Mr Donovan says that while Seeka Australia’s relationship with Radfords is in its infancy, it is already strong.

“When we bought the system, Seeka Australia was technologically under-developed. However, FreshPack Multi has boosted that significantly.

“Radfords has positioned us well for long-term gains in fruit production and further operational efficiencies, especially when our kiwifruit and pear plantings reach full production by 2021.

“We understand what the system is capable of and that the potential exists for future orchard management software which will bolster our operation further. We’ve seen Radfords Software evolve with the kiwifruit industry in New Zealand and we look forward to Radfords being part of Seeka Australia’s journey.”

Efficiencies at a glance

OFFLINE SCANNING

Accurate recording of bin numbers,
2 hours saved daily

LABEL PRINTING

40 hours saved weekly

LABEL COUNTING

2-4 hours saved daily

ORDER MANAGEMENT

1-2 days saved weekly

SALES REPORTING

1 hour saved daily

USER TRAINING

None required

Complete control
from soil to supermarket