



ing deregulation. If there is a bright spot to 2004 events it is simply the new understanding that all New Zealand operators ie growing, postharvest and exporting are too small and dangerously insignificant not to be working with others (of their own choice).

Co-operation is important in areas of account servicing, shipping, quality standards (enforcement), market access and informal liaison (in my view the latter is exceptionally important). "There will not be immediate buy-in to these concepts - they can only evolve and a bit more bruising will probably occur along the way.

"Growers should communicate and take time to learn more about their business. Under consignment selling all growers are actually "exporters". The kiwifruit industry had some bruising, sad and very destructive times after it lost its way for a period. However the net gain was a considerably better informed collection of people at every level. This helped a lot to turn things around."

Blemish sorting now available for pipfruit

At packhouse level, there is now blemish sorting available to the pipfruit industry from Compac Sorting Equipment Ltd. This year it has been used at the Johnny Appleseed site in Hastings for Granny Smith, Braeburn and Fuji.

Phil Prior, Compac's New Zealand market manager and global marketing manager, said blemish sorting was also this season on kiwifruit at Hume Pack-N-Cool in Katikati and Seeka Kiwifruit Industries in Te Puke.

Phil Prior says Compac began development of blemish sorting in 1998 with the first commercial unit installed in 2001 to sort Californian oranges. It was then expanded to include mandarins.

It took years to develop the technology as it needs an enormous amount of processing power.

Apples and kiwifruit have followed citrus and Compac will explore other fruit types. The latest installation was 33 lanes for sorting pomegranates.

Apples were much more complex than citrus, because of the wide colour range and range of shapes. Full commercial release of the apple sorting blemish unit will happen for the coming New Zealand season, early 2005.

One of the advantages of the technology is that it is used for pre-sorting. The fruit is washed, pre-sized and then distributed throughout the shed, allowing as much fruit as possible to be sorted by technology before any human contact. This enables the packhouse and staff to work to capacity and enables a packhouse to perform with fewer staff. One major advantage is that the technology improves consistency. There are cases where the technology does a better job than the human eye.

Without blemish sorting, throughput can fluctuate according to the quality of the particular line of fruit.

Blemish sorting can increase throughput to up to 30% and

can be utilised in a number of ways to maximize return on investment. Hume Pack-N-Cool even found occasions that more fruit was being left in than taken out while still adhering to ZESPRI's export requirements due to the accuracy of the Compac InVision 9000 system. The packhouse tipped 20-30% more bins this season while using fewer sorters and the same amount of packing staff as the previous season.

The unit that performs blemish sorting, the Compac InVision 9000, also builds in colour sorting, acts as a diameter sizer and excludes misshapen fruit. Dry matter is a separate technology and requires its own unit.

Phil says that uptake of the technology may be slowed in New Zealand by the difficult season the pipfruit industry has experienced.

In Washington State an 8-lane sizer including blemish sorting is being installed this month and it will also be used for a 20-lane packing line there next year.



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