

Fruit packaging is feeling the flow

Fruit packaging could benefit from the flow wrapping packaging used in the confectionery industry.



The freshness of a bag of potato chips or a bar of chocolate is, for the most part, thanks to flow wrapping. Flow wrapping uses crimp seals on top and bottom and a fin seal running the length of the packet. The method has been used for sweets, baked goods and many other items to be found in supermarkets for quite some time.

What is new is its application in the fruit and vegetable market.

Already leading supermarkets such as Woolworths, Checkers and Pick n Pay are packaging things such as tomatoes, green peppers and even salad like this. It guarantees a longer shelf life and freshness.

"In overseas supermarkets, apples, pears and citrus are being flow-wrapped before being presented on shelves. South African producers still export deciduous fruit such as apples and pears in ordinary packaging but there is a growing trend, especially in the UK, towards flow wrapping these products before they are shipped," says Wiekus Venter, project and sales engineer of MED Automation.

Apart from improved freshness in flow wrapped products, factors such as efficient labelling and tracking and the benefits of fewer operators and improved packing speed, all lead to much improved cost-efficiency and peace of mind about exported products being fresh and free of bruises.

Inline printing of film for information such as place or origin, grown by, size banding, variety and grower/packer code is more time efficient than the manual sticking of labels on polybags. A flow wrapped bag is considerably less expensive than the conventional polybag, partly because the technique allows packaging with the help of only one or two persons, whereas hand-sorting and -packaging systems needs six to eight.

To add to the system's allure, Burg Machinefabriek, a Dutch engineering company using MED as its South African agent,

has developed an automatic feeder, which accurately singulate, count and present fruit, then move them directly into the flow wrapping machines. The system involves specially designed infeed belts for tray and loose packing of soft fruit. Soft rubber loops support the collecting and transporting collation of apples. Fewer operators are involved and sixty packs per minute can be achieved.

"There's no doubt that the complete system should be useful in bringing South African markets up to international levels - with the added benefits of speed and lower cost," concludes Venter.

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