GILLIESTON FRESH PRODUCE • SHEPPARTON, VIC

CASE STUDY

OPTIMISING NUTRITION TO PRODUCE HIGH-QUALITY TOMATOES.

**CHALLENGE**
Gillieston Fresh Produce grows tomatoes for wholesalers on the East Coast of Australia but were not able to accurately track nutrition and other inputs applied to each field or record the cost of production and profit for a specific field.

**SOLUTION**
After seeing their agronomist use Agworld, the Borzillo family decided to join him on the same platform. They now plan and budget their whole season together in Agworld and after that record every single field operation as the season progresses.

**RESULT**
Gillieston Fresh Produce now has accurate historic records available in Agworld, per individual field, of which nutritional inputs were used and what yield they achieved. They also know the exact cost per field and whether the field was profitable. By creating accurate records in Agworld, Gillieston Fresh Produce is also Freshcare compliant and is able to easily create every report needed for audits.

"Tomato producers work with very variable market conditions in a relatively short season; Agworld helps us make sure we remain profitable by accurately tracking everything we do in the field."

Ang Borzillo
Gillieston Fresh Produce, Shepparton, VIC
Preparation is key for quality

The Borzillo family, trading as Gillieston Fresh Produce (GFP), grow 160 acres of Entice tomatoes annually on their farm just west of Shepparton, VIC. Entice tomatoes, a Seminis Vegetable Seeds variety, are a firm and gourmet shaped tomato variety that is grown mainly to supply supermarkets and other outlets with first grade fruit. Second grade tomatoes end up in the supply chain for food service companies while the rest gets made into tomato paste at the Kagome factory in Echuca, VIC.

Before the season starts, agronomist Ruaan Du Plessis creates a plan for the whole season together with the Borzillo family. Ang Borzillo explains: “We sit down with Ruaan during winter and go through our soil tests per field and, keeping the individual soil types in mind, create a nutritional plan per field in Agworld. We then also work out which fields will be planted early and which ones later in the season. We have 8 or 9 plantings per season with 2-3 weeks between plantings so we can stagger our supply throughout the season. We start planting late September and typically have our last plant in the second week of January. We can then start picking mid-December and finish picking mid-May, which gives us a 16-20-week season.”

“An average block can be picked 5-8 times, which is why nutritional planning is so important for us and this is also why its key for us to track our nutrition in Agworld. We tend to apply lime and gypsum pre-plant together with a band of super-single, whilst also putting a lot of starter fertiliser deep-down in the root zone. Between picks we then apply foliar fertilisers and fertigation with almost every irrigation. N, P, K and Ca are all very important for tomatoes and we have to make sure our plants have plenty available. Tomato plants take a lot out of the soil and nutrition correlates directly with fruit quality, which in-turn correlates with our profit, so there is nothing more important than nutrition for us.”

Ang continues: “This is why Agworld works so well for us, as we can create an as-applied report per field per nutritional element and know exactly what has been applied during the season and when. We use a lot of different style fertilisers but in Agworld they all translate back to the actual nutrition applied, which is exactly what we need to see in our reporting.”

Aiming for the retail market

Where it’s usually just Ang with his father, brother and 1 full-time employee working the farm, the start of picking sees the packing shed turn into a hive of activity with contract labour for the sorting and packing of tomatoes. Where
Ang and his brother manage the packing shed and marketing of the product, their father focuses on growing the tomatoes and their full time worker is in charge of the picking process.

After tomatoes get picked, they get pre-cooled to 8 degrees Celsius so they are less vulnerable during the sorting process. The sorting process sees the tomatoes graded from first & second grade to rest and unripe. Second grade tomatoes go into the food-service channel while unripe tomatoes get fed to cows on local dairy farms and rest tomatoes get sold for tomato paste.

Around 80% of the harvest is classified as first grade, which is key in order to remain profitable. Ang explains: “First grade tomatoes that we can supply to the major retailers, via wholesalers, is our main market and approx. 80% of what we produce. In order to service this market as well as possible, we even run 3 of our own refrigerated trucks that can carry 22 pallets of tomatoes each. We make 2 trips per day to Melbourne and 1 trip to Sydney while we use outside vendors for transport to the Brisbane markets.”

Freshcare certification

In order to be able to supply these retailers, GFP has to be Freshcare accredited, which focuses on food safety, quality and the traceability of inputs utilised in the growing process. Ang: “Supplying wholesalers that focus on the major retailers is the most profitable part of our production; so being Freshcare accredited is very important to us. For Freshcare we have to track every input we apply with great detail, even down to individual batch numbers of chemicals! MRL’s are obviously important as well and we do tend to spray a lot for sucking insects like thrips; but we’re lucky in a sense that we don’t have to worry about Queensland fruit fly as tomatoes don’t spend a lot of time ripe on the vine. All of this gets recorded in Agworld for traceability and certification purposes.”

“Agworld lets everyone in our operation enter information, which really helps with this process. Crop scouts create a scout report which gets sent to both our agronomist Ruaan and myself. Ruaan then creates recommendations in Agworld and I turn that into a work order. After the order has been completed it then gets turned into an actual and becomes part of our records; easy! Agworld really works well, but the more you use it, the more you know and the more comfortable you get with it – which in turn makes you put more information in. And the more data you put in Agworld, the more useful information you’re able to extract on the other end…it’s quite addictive really, in a good way!”

Tracking profitability

Fields only get used for tomatoes every 4 years in order to balance nutritional demands and provide for a rotation that prevents soil-borne diseases, mainly fusarium. In the other three years of the rotation, the Borzillo family grows hay for local dairy farms with occasionally some oilseeds and cereals. Tomatoes are clearly the cash-crop in this rotation but, with high growing costs and a very variable market and price. The sub-surface drip-irrigation for example needs to get setup just for that one year of tomatoes, so they can be irrigated with water that originates from the Goulburn river and Warringa basin which reaches the area through a series of channels.
GFP is using Agworld to track their profitability and create reports for post-season analyses. Ang explains: “By recording everything we do on our fields in Agworld, from plastic to drip-tape, pre-emergents and every single soil working, we get an accurate cost per hectare from the field all the way to the packing shed. We also enter our average yield per field in Agworld, based on the number of bins that we harvest, which weigh around 450 kg; unfortunately though, our harvester doesn’t have a yield-monitor on it. We then record our average selling price, which allows us to generate the farm performance report in Agworld which is as accurate as possible for us.”

“And in the end, this is what is most important for the future of our family business: producing high quality tomatoes that command a premium with our clients and that allow us to remain profitable in the future. The way I see it, Agworld plays a central role in this and I think that using a platform like Agworld is only going to be more important in the years ahead.”

IMPROVING PROFITABILITY IN AGRICULTURE

WHAT AGWORLD OFFERS YOU:

- Collect data at every level in a structured way.
- Easily share data with anyone important to your organization.
- Un-paralleled insights into your operation.
- Empowers you to make more profitable decisions than your peers.