

Grower Profile.

Blueberry Country



Success is only as good as the team behind it. Warrick MacDonald values the care taken over each and every blueberry that goes to market.

Most Kiwi's enjoy blueberries, famous for their health properties and commonly referred to as a Super Food. It is said they contain more disease-fighting antioxidants than nearly any other fruit and the increased publicity of health benefits has encouraged widespread demand.

There is a strong chance consumers have sampled the popular fruit from one of Blueberry Country's three sites in Ohaupo in South Waikato, Ngatea in the Hauraki Plains or Otatau in Southland.

Blueberry Country is a family business and New Zealand's largest blueberry orchard with 400 acres (160 hectares) currently in production.

The business is owned by the Furniss family and currently has three generations of family working there. The company is operated by Greg Furniss along with key team members Warrick MacDonald (General Manager), Sally Barber (National Fresh Sales Manager) and Roger Darlington (National Orchard Manager).

"The head offices at Ohaupo houses the main processing facility with the blueberries grown, harvested and packed on site," said Warrick MacDonald.

"Blueberry Country has a pick-your-own operation at Ohaupo and Ngatea to complement the business and Ohaupo recently added a café."

Across the three locations the company packs on average 20 tonnes of blueberries per day during the peak of the harvest season.

BBC TECHNOLOGIES

A key point in the company's history was when Greg and Alison bought out the other shareholders in the late 1980's, enabling the family to explore new harvest and process opportunities.

They went on to set up sister company BBC Technologies – a company that specialises in the manufacturing and development of Advanced Processing Technology.

In the late 1990's a colour sorter prototype was manufactured offering

efficient, cost-effective packing equipment designed to cull green and red fruit. Global sales quickly grew and equipment has since been sold throughout North America, as well as Europe, South America and Australasia.

The company is now a global leader in sorting, grading, and packing machines with offices in the United States, Chile, the Netherlands and shortly opening in China.

THE BUSINESS

Behind every strong business is a network of family, key staff and excellent business support.

Blueberry Country has 25 full time staff and balloon to approximately 300 during the height of the season.

"Our team are extremely dedicated and passionate about their role and proud of the hard work they have put in to achieve great results for the business," said General Manager, Warrick MacDonald.

"We actively encourage the team to take ownership and share passion. We try to create an environment in which people want to work."

While Blueberry Country supplies fresh and frozen

produce for the local market, a strong focus is on off-shore markets.

The majority of fruit is exported across the Tasman with a small volume going further afield into Asia.

International trends show demand for blueberries is growing at a faster rate than other fruit, with China proving to be a potential growth market for the company.

Warrick MacDonald said the company's philosophy was built around integrity and relationships.

"We are working hard to maintain long-term relationships and developing new opportunities as the business evolves both locally and globally," said MacDonald.

"As a company we embrace change and share passion. We want to position ourselves as global leaders in our field."

"We actively encourage the team to take ownership and share passion. We try to create an environment in which people want to work."



Grower Profile.

Exception Cucumbers

Arie and his likeminded team seek to minimise their environmental footprint wherever possible. Their passion for sustainable growing has led to the implementation of a range of environmentally friendly techniques.

Meet Arie van der Houwen from Pukekohe. He owns and operates Exception Cucumbers, a 50,000 square metre market garden specialising in telegraph and cocktail cucumbers.

Like many members of our cooperative, Arie didn't start off as a grower in New Zealand. He immigrated from Holland in 1997 bringing a wealth of knowledge and education with him.

With five generations of growing capsicum, flowers, grapes, tomatoes and cucumbers behind him, Arie had the ideal pedigree for success in our industry.

He cut his teeth working for a large glasshouse producer before taking the big step to go out on his own.

Although starting by leasing a 1,000 square metre block, Arie dreamed big and now operates a property 50 times that size. He always knew that he would need to scale up to be financially viable and commercially successful.

He is a self-confessed hands-on owner, with a practical focus. On any given day he'd prefer to be out in the glasshouses and packing shed just as much as in the office. He simply gets stuck into the work that needs to be done! He has a great deal of help and support from his wife Vivienne. She has an extensive education in chemistry, psychology, media advertising, sales and marketing which she uses to support various projects.

Creating efficiencies across the business is a strong focus for Arie and he is continuously looking for ways to improve.

He acknowledges the key to making his business sustainable is to specialise and have sufficient scale of the operation large enough to ensure commercial viability.

SUSTAINABLE APPROACH

Arie and his likeminded team seek to minimise their environmental footprint wherever possible.

Their passion for sustainable growing has led to the implementation of a range of environmentally friendly techniques.

Cucumber plants are grown under glass in an organic

growing medium known as Perlite (Perlite is used in soil mixes – including soilless mediums – to improve aeration and modify the soil substructure). This is then recycled into the garden after a few crop changes.

All of the waste water is recycled and rain water is collected.

The glasshouses are all controlled by leading edge computerised climate control systems, which monitor efficiencies relating to watering, CO2 enrichment, respiration, heat transfer, ventilation, nutrients, and heating pipes.

The market garden also uses an IPM (Integrated Pest Management) programme. This reduces the amount of

pesticides and fungicides used to an absolute minimum. IPM focuses on the use of natural controls rather than chemical interventions. This system utilises the fact that insect pests have their own natural predators and parasites and these beneficial insects are identified and introduced into the crops in order to keep the harmful bugs away.

THE PRODUCE

Not all cucumbers are the same. Their roles in the kitchen are different.

Exception Cucumbers specialise in two varieties – the Telegraph and Snack Cucs.

The Telegraph is the longest member of the cucumber family measuring 25cm to 40 cm. They

are a seedless variety with edible skin.

Snack Cucs, a cocktail cucumber, is grown exclusively by Exception Cucumbers. Promoted as a delicious raw and healthy snack, they are a smooth uniform fruit, 9-11cm long with a sweet flavour.

WORKING WITH MG

Arie, who joined the MG cooperative as a shareholder in 2011, has worked closely with MG to develop business plans that maximise sales opportunities, especially vital at peak production periods.

Branch Profile.

Christchurch



When Branch Manager, Jeff Newmann, started with MG Marketing (MG) 17 years ago the operation was doing less than a quarter of the business it is today.

There is not a secret strategy for the enormous growth. The philosophy is simple – work together with growers and customers and offer the best customer service in town.

When asked about the strong growth, Jeff said, “In a nutshell it’s about customer service levels.”

“On the back of that it’s about having the staff that can maintain

those branch standards and company standards and they just flow onto the customer service levels.”

The personal, engaging approach is a reflection of the culture and the environment that has been created over a number of years. At the core of the branch is a team of loyal MG staff with ten of the 65 staff working for MG for more than 20 years.

Jeff also spoke with pride of his observations of the relationships between his team, growers and retail customers.

“All staff from sales to

administration to warehouse are on a first name basis with our customers and it’s friendly.”

“It’s that nothing’s an issue sort of an attitude that increases customer service levels.”

“If you provide that level of service you have a point of difference over your competitors and if you do it consistently you’ll get consistent repeat sales.”

The facility has enjoyed ongoing investment with three upgrades since moving to the Waterloo Road site in 1990. Recently, the entire floor space was reconfigured to create greater

efficiencies, new lighting was fitted and a substantial new cool chain was installed.

“The benefits for the growers, customers and MG are massive,” said Jeff.

“The way our produce is presented has improved and that makes a huge difference.”

“The growers are particularly pleased with our improved cool chain facility for their product and retail customers are enjoying the extra shelf life of the produce.”

Continuously looking for ways to be more efficient is viewed as

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necessary to offer the best solutions as the needs of growers and customers evolve.

The commitment of the Christchurch team is reflected in the 24-7 onsite support.

“Offering the best solutions, good communication with the client, and timely delivery—all of those things are important.”

“But we go a step further in making sure that we do everything with passion, and with the goal of delivering an exceptional customer experience,” Jeff added.



Mark-it Labels

Mark-it Labels design and manufacture labels, crate cards and tags. With nationwide sales and distribution coverage along with the latest manufacturing technologies, Mark-It Labels is at the forefront of the variable information industry.

They specialise in producing FMCG & Food Labels suitable for many environments that range from Ambient to Freezer grade applications.

Mark-it Labels has the scale to manufacture significant label runs while still offering flexibility and a personal approach.

They work closely with a number of businesses in the horticulture industry as well as servicing fishing, agriculture, logistics and retail sectors. They also sell and service a large range of label and card printers and can provide a number of options to meet your requirements and budget.

Contact their team and let them assist you with your labelling and printing requirements.

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Standpoint. Together. Stronger.



I hope you have had a great start to the year!

Last year was another busy one for the MG cooperative and the new year presents a real opportunity for us to further build on the success of 2014.

A key focus this year will be reviewing the constitution with our growers. The constitution provides a framework for the cooperative and defines how the business is governed.

This year we are even more determined to better understand the business of our growers and customers in order to deliver mutually beneficial outcomes.

It is clear that managing our business in a sustainable way is vital for our growers and future success. We believe our combined knowledge is one of our greatest strengths and,

when leveraged, will deliver mutual benefits.

We will continue to build on the strength of our relationships and use our position as industry leaders to support our growers while continuing to provide excellent service to our customers.

A key focus this year will be reviewing the constitution with our growers. The constitution provides a framework for the cooperative and defines how the business is governed.

Although we have been operating for more than 90 years, large parts of the constitution remain unchanged.

MG has grown, developed and evolved significantly, especially in the last 20 years. Our goal is not to reinvent the wheel but bring our constitution up-to-date with best practice and simplify some processes to better reflect the way we currently operate.

The majority of the constitution is still relevant to how we operate and manage MG and overall reflects our distinctive

identity. However, we'd like to review it to ensure it remains relevant to the way we do business today.

At last year's AGM many of our shareholders stressed the importance of working with them to better understand the current constitution and the impact of any proposed changes.

We are a grower owned cooperative. Any changes need to be for the benefit of our members and clearly understood before decisions are made.

This year we will deliver an engagement programme to ensure our grower shareholders have all the necessary information.

I look forward to continuing to share updates and catching up with you throughout the year.

Peter Hendry
CEO

Online Grower Delivery Advice System (GDA) Meets with Grower Approval

More than 100 of our growers have adopted the online grower delivery advice system since its launch late last year. GDA is a discrete, internet based system designed to electronically log your consignments with an MG branch, ahead of your produce arriving.

Customised for each grower, GDA includes a full range of products normally supplied to MG. Once a consignment advice has been created and confirmed, an office copy can be printed along with a copy to be despatched with the produce. Any changes made by MG Marketing will be

automatically emailed back to each grower providing an efficient audit trail. GDA will soon include growers' BCTIs (tax invoices) and daily sales reports which can be viewed on-screen or printed out.

Each grower/supplier has their own unique login and password, ensuring total confidentiality.

"GDA has revolutionised a large part of the administrative side of the business. It's fast, it's efficient, and importantly, it gives us a record that we can go back to and use as input into some of the future focussed decisions we're

making in our business."
(Shirley Hiscock, Panmure Orchards, Cromwell)

"Just a quick note to let you know that I absolutely love the new system!!! It is great to use, easy to change crates, pallets etc. and has saved so much time in the mornings for me! And is much easier than other markets' systems. Well done :)"
(Sue Wood, Turiwiri Produce, Dargaville)

If you are not using GDA talk to MG Marketing about the benefits it could bring to your business



Growing You

With the ever-changing face of the produce world, it's important to be able to access some of the new thinking and advances in our industry in order to keep up with the play.

MG Marketing will soon be announcing details of a programme designed to support our grower-shareholders in adding value to their business.

We look forward to providing more details soon.

Managing agrichemical residues

Exceeding an agrichemical residue limit can have significant consequences for growers and customers. The management of agrichemical residues is a fundamental part of good agricultural practice (NZGAP) and is something that should not be left to chance.

- The plan should highlight any products used 'off label' -the ones that are not registered for the crop type in NZ. For these products, the Maximum Residue Limit (MRL) is much lower than for the crop listed on the label meaning that careful management and monitoring is required.

- Agrichemical residues can decline more slowly in greenhouse systems than field grown crops. This can result in residue levels above the MRL even when the label withholding period is followed.

- Residue testing is not a legal requirement, but is becoming standard practice for many growers and retailers. If your crop is not registered with an industry residue testing programme, it is recommended that you take samples of your own prior to harvest, particularly if agrichemicals are being used off label.

- As a reminder, all chemical labels should state that "It is an offense for the users of this product to cause residues exceeding the relevant MRL in the NZ (Maximum Residues Of Agricultural Compounds) Food Standard".

The management of agrichemical residues is a fundamental part of good agricultural practice (NZGAP) and is something that should not be left to chance.

- All growers should have a residue management plan. This could be an industry programme, or one that is developed specifically for the business.

- A plan includes a list of the agrichemicals that may be used on the crop, as well as the timing, rate and method of application. Careful consideration should be given to the date of the last application of each product to ensure that pre harvest intervals (withholding periods) can be met.

- Be aware of the MRL for each of the agrichemicals in your spray programme. An up-to-date database of residue limits for agrichemicals sold in NZ is available on the Ministry for Primary Industries website: pxmrl.maf.govt.nz.

- Pre-harvest intervals (the time between the last application and the first harvest) must be strictly adhered to. A common cause of MRL problems is simply that the wrong area of the crop was harvested.