

MARCO Trac-IT® Software Modules help British importer & packer of premium fruits

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They have helped us deliver our continually changing requirements and have shared their knowledge and expertise. ”

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Founded as a family-owned business in 1897, Richard Hochfeld Ltd has been one of Europe's most respected fruit importers since established as a business in the UK in 1936.

Richard Hochfeld Ltd (RH) relationship began with MARCO in 2007 after identifying that the desire to pack to an average weight was acceptable to our main retail customer. This allowed the opportunity to optimise the yield of imported table grapes. Phase 1 installation was a multifunctional line with materials handling conveyors for flow wrapped product. In 2011 these lines were relocated by MARCO to a purpose-built site at Orchard Place, Kent, where Phase 2 was introduced with an additional 10 weigh stations, dedicated to 'packed at source' product with high-speed check weighing and flow wrapping.

In 2013 we pioneered heat sealing of table grapes to satisfy a perceived customer requirement for a pack with maximum integrity, product clarity, reduction in packaging plastic use, and a clean hermetic seal, which allowed other technologies to be employed.

Today in Phase 5 our lines utilise 114 weigh stations, heat sealing and flow wrapping with full yield, weight control, check weigh and film or label barcode verification. We can pack a variety of products including grapes, soft fruits, stone fruit as well as top fruit.

Throughout the time we have used MARCO weighing and materials handling solutions we have evolved from supplying a single customer with a limited range of SKUs to being adaptive packers and service providers for a range of retail customers offering many different products and weights.



As we continue to develop our products and processes, using the MARCO Trac-IT® software modules we can monitor and react to our people within the production process to get the best outcome, guided by real data, in real time. The Yield Control Module (YCM) provides security in delivering minimum or average weights and minimises the amount of “give-away” within legal limits. The Checkweighers validate this data ensuring 100% compliance. The Line Control Module (LCM) checking of correct barcode and its readability on jobs means our chances of delivering non scanning products or wrong barcode products into retail tills is nil. We also have the security of an additional automated packaging check.

Simple reporting systems enabled within the MARCO software captures the reasons for any machine downtime, allowing us to carry out tailored investigations.

Challenges

Labour is a valuable resource. To be efficient and adaptive requires a detailed understanding of expected job rates in packs per minute, per packer and the factors that affect the products and work rates in those jobs. By using MARCO Trac-IT® YCM and QCM (Quality Control Module) to monitor people and outcomes in production, we can be reactive within jobs as well as using the data to predict outcomes in similar jobs. This allows us to take on and cost new products to our packing portfolio and helps make us an agile service provider.



Having production QA results recorded in real time directly onto tablets means that not only can this information be viewed and shared internally, and at the end of each job, it is also stored in the cloud so can be used as evidence against challenges found in smaller samples – such as at customer depots or in customer complaints.

Programming of small job runs can be monitored and tailored to remain efficient and reduce downtime for better overall production planning. Monitoring new job types / products allows us to set achievable work rate benchmarks and targets which can also be used to motivate production operatives and allows us the facility to reward performance.

Evidencing compliance is paramount. Scheduling verification checks within QCM, and the production records of YCM, LCM and Checkweighers, allows quick, reliable and open reporting.

Sustainable Solutions

By Phase 4 we identified we wanted to be substantially paper free in the packhouse and to fully utilise the data generated so it could be interrogated and used. We estimated at the introduction of QCM that for each packing job of ten pallets we were using around 25 pieces of paper. This resulted in 129,500 pieces of paper per year that needed to be filed and stored for a further three years. At 5g per sheet, by utilising QCM not only do we save 6475kg of paper per year, (the equivalent of 8 x 50' pine trees!) but we can also interrogate jobs at any time from a PC in a production office.

Additionally, photographs embedded in the QCM checks show label compliance of inner packs and box end. This is being further developed into an App. for mobile devices for instant access. We also utilise the QCM to both prompt operatives and prove other production line checks such as startup checks, packaging checks, seal checks, and positive release.

Why we chose MARCO

The software at the core of the MARCO Trac-IT® Suite, YCM, tracks a people driven process, can identify outliers in the data and identify solutions all within the security of delivering the right product and the correct weights. By adding in QCM and LCM modules we were able to track and interrogate the whole compliance process better, allowing us to identify those that need additional training or help.



Through the addition of Production Data Display (PDD) screens we can share the progress statistics with the packers and line teams immediately which all helps for a smooth workflow. We aim to have an inclusive way of measuring performance. The screens can also be used for live messaging and demonstration of quality defects or desired final product presentations.

Working with MARCO

MARCO have been with us throughout our packing journey. We are still packing on the original lines which in itself is testament to the robust fabrication. They have helped us deliver our continually changing requirements and have shared their knowledge and expertise. We, in turn have encouraged them to mutually evolve systems such as QCM, develop punnet tracking systems and are willing participants in any new developments that provide the tools to deliver high compliance and performance. As such they are trusted partners, and their knowledge within other industries has been useful in adapting ideas for fresh product solutions.

We have also encouraged the use of these systems with our grower partners overseas in Chile, encouraging them to invest in a complete and efficient value chain from production to retailer's shelves. We also have a packing line in mainland China, where with our joint venture partners, we provide China retailers with products that we source from our existing supply base.

A sustainable future for all

Future plans include retaining the competitive advantage that we hold. Together with MARCO and our supplier partners, we will continue to develop weighing and materials handling solutions in the UK and overseas that enable us to deliver a comprehensive value chain of an efficiently produced, highly compliant and sustainable product every time.

Karen Cleave, Technical Director, Richard Hochfeld