

Fruit testing technology helps leading avocado supplier win firm retail deal

Fruit firmness testing technology from UK-based Sinclair iQ™ has enabled South African avocado supplier Westfalia to secure a major retail contract for 'ripe and ready to eat' produce.

Westfalia grows and distributes avocados across South Africa and exports to retail markets in the UK and Europe. The company recently invested in Sinclair iQ's non-destructive online system for measuring the firmness of individual fruit to predict ripeness levels.

The introduction of the Sinclair Internal Quality – Firmness Tester (SIQ-FT) has enabled Westfalia to supply consistent quality avocados and boost customer satisfaction. The company has now secured an exclusive supply contract with one of South Africa's premium retail chains. The deal will see the launch of an innovative 'Guaranteed Ripe-and-ready' programme, believed to be the first of its kind in South African supermarkets.

Alan Synman, general manager, Value Adding Division, of Westfalia says: "We previously sorted avocados by hand but found that fruit in the same punnet could be inconsistent in ripeness quality. The online testing system has streamlined our entire packing operation and provided many advantages. It allows us to specify the firmness level required, enabling us to supply fruit at optimum ripeness for local retail markets. The Sinclair iQ system has proved to be an excellent asset for Westfalia."

Alan Synman adds: "Ripe and ready to eat produce is still a relatively new retail concept in South Africa and we are leading the way in the avocado sector. We hope to increase volumes by around 40% over the coming year as consumer confidence grows."

Neil Winney, Product Manager for Sinclair iQ says: "Our work with Westfalia shows that the SIQ-FT is a valuable tool for measuring the ripeness of avocados. The main benefit of the system over other measuring techniques is that it is non-destructive and tests each and every fruit passing over the line at high speed. As customers are supplied with consistent quality fruit of a specified firmness, the system helps eliminate the costly rejection of produce considered too hard or soft."

The SIQ-FT has been developed for use by fruit distributors and packhouses worldwide. The system uses piezoelectric sensors to measure firmness around the circumference of each individual fruit online. The SIQ-FT operates at commercial speeds of up to 10 fruit per second and is compatible with most major sizing and grading equipment, enabling fruit to be sorted into multiple firmness bands.

SIQ-FT systems are now installed at a number of commercial fruit operations worldwide including the UK, Europe, the USA, South America, New Zealand and South Africa. Product applications include avocado, mango, kiwifruit, stonefruit and apples.

Sinclair iQ is a division of UK Company Sinclair International Ltd, a worldwide market leader in fresh produce labelling application systems. Based in Norwich, the company has a global network of sales and service teams in over 35 countries.