

**RAFFA FIELDS**
— ASPARAGUS —

Overcoming pandemic travel-ban challenges to manage the first remote implementation of a comprehensive packhouse solution for a leading Australian asparagus grower, packer and exporter.

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Rosalie Raffa

Raffa Fields required a robust, flexible system that provided quality inventory and stock control from harvesting to distribution and enabling a digital transformation of business process.

Family owned and operated Raffa Fields Pty Ltd is one of the largest asparagus producers and packers in Australia. Annually, it produces some 2,000 tonnes of premium green asparagus in Victoria's Koo Wee Rup region for domestic and export consumption in two peak seasons – August to December and January to April. It services both the Australian market and the export market, with supply to Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, China and Taiwan. It also distributes imported asparagus during its off-season to its primary Australian retail partner, Coles.

Established in the 1950s when Luigi Raffa migrated to Australia from Sicily, Italy, the intergenerational business has specialised in asparagus production since the 1980s.



Rising to the challenge in tough times

When Raffa Fields began supplying produce direct to leading Australian supermarket chain Coles in 2020, the business was also given the opportunity to run the import program. However, its custom-built software was undergoing a redevelopment and not keeping pace with its evolving needs. By April 2021, Raffa Fields was in dire straits and facing a fast-approaching asparagus season without a workable packhouse solution.

"We were looking for an end-to-end solution that could handle a complex and specific product process from harvesting the raw product to final sale, for 12 months of the year. We needed to transition from handwritten notes and a duplication of data, have confidence in our data and be better positioned for growth," sales and operation manager, Rosalee Raffa says.

"We looked at various systems around the world but kept coming back to Radfords. Then we went to see FreshPack Multi in action at Priest Bros. Orchards, Victoria and they couldn't speak highly enough about the software and Radfords."

Undaunted that Radfords had not worked in the asparagus space, Raffa Fields seized the opportunity to be the first in the sector to adopt Radfords' technology.

Working under COVID travel restrictions with its team unable to visit the site, compounded by a condensed project timeframe from scope to delivery, Radfords implemented its "out of the box" traceability, grading and inventory management solution, FreshPack, and quality control-focussed application FreshQuality in time for Raffa Fields' 2021 spring harvest. Implementation of Freshpack's EDI (electronic data interchange) module to streamline ordering between Raffa Fields and Coles supermarket chain followed in 2022.



PALLETISATION AND STOCK CREATION
IN THE RAFFA FAMILY'S ASPARAGUS PACKHOUSE

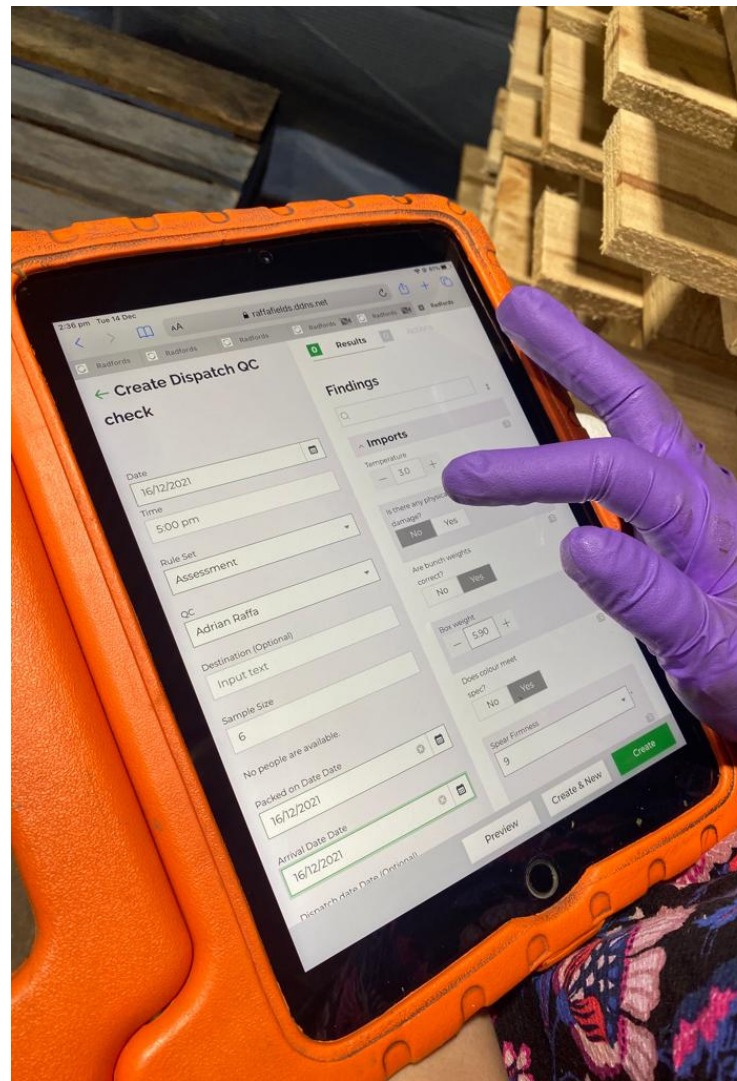
"FreshPack Multi and FreshQuality have transformed packhouse operations and created multiple efficiencies, immediately saving the Raffa Fields' sales and logistics team up to five hours a day. ."

Adopting new systems

“The technology has eliminated manual processes and allowed us to focus on the job at hand, rather than be prohibited by an inflexible system. We’re now able to use our time to analyse the data, rather than spend that time trying to extract it,” she says.

FreshPack has evolved since its inception to become “produce-agnostic”, allowing any producer to adopt it without customisation beyond minor configuration to suit individual workflows. The only modification made for Raffa Fields was to integrate scales to record weight crates at the time of receipt.

“We really needed the technology to work. We could see its benefits and worked closely with Radfords to make it happen. The onus was on us to provide accurate and detailed information – everything from the layout of the packhouse to how our business worked – as well as the testing and knowing how to execute the process so when asparagus arrived at the packhouse, there were no surprises.



“Radfords’ communication was constant and clear and they supported us closely throughout the 12-week project. We made a data-driven decision and we now have a program that supports our business.”

Software powering decision-making

"From the outset, the software seemed very capable of adjusting to our needs," she says. "Importantly, Radfords supported our business as it was, and, if anything, adapted processes to suit us. The software fitted like a glove. We prioritised the project over everything else because it was urgent to have it go-live for the harvest.

"FreshPack's functionality, which allows us to create inventory and allocate stock, is so robust and accurate, that we now have confidence that what we dispatch will balance with what is in the cool room. Previously, we would have had to check, double check and cross reference data with stock. And FreshPack can tell us the the size and distribution of a pack run which, in the past, would have been time consuming and onerous.

"We have full visibility of our produce in real time, the functionality to customise reporting, and more control over traceability."

Rosalee Raffa says manual data handling is a thing of the past and the time saved is being allocated elsewhere. Label printing means Raffa Fields can quickly and easily create and print labels instantly – saving the time and complication associated with undertaking this task outside the program, she says.

"The technology is also easy to pick up, and easy to teach. We can have up to 120 workers in the packhouse during peak periods and, for many, English is a second language. There's some simple training required and it's easier now to upskill people. Our industry, and our business changes a lot, and quickly. Our system needs to do that too."

"We keep on discovering more of what FreshPack is capable of. The more we ask it to do, the more it can do."



Customer sales platform streamlines trading

Radfords' EDI function which streamlines trading between Raffa Fields and Coles was integrated following the smooth implementation of FreshPack and add-on, FreshQuality. "Previously we had two software systems (ours and Coles) that didn't speak to each other. With this B2B platform now integrated within FreshPack, our software now speaks to our customer's software. We can now log onto the Coles system from any device either in the packhouse or remotely to gain a better snapshot of our general trade and identify any gaps we need to fill. Purchase orders are all uploaded automatically and feed through to FreshPack. Invoicing is automatic and seamless."

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The software has provided routine and consistency to our process which is supported by practical services.”



Equipping Raffa Fields with autonomy to drive success

Raffa Fields’ adoption of the technology has enabled its autonomy and ended its reliance on third party suppliers such as software developers.

“The technology has made a significant difference to how we operate. It’s provided routine and consistency to our process which is supported by practical service. By removing the human element, it has eliminated errors while providing a deeper understanding of traceability backed by quality records,” Rosalee Raffa says. “Our relationship with Radfords is interactive and close. We go through a lot of change in our process year-on-year. During implementation of the technology and, in the time since, we have worked together to keep up with changes. The team has consistently been efficient at communicating and quick to respond – which is essential in our industry.

“When you have an effective Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, you feel supported and have the confidence to explore new opportunities.”

Efficiencies at a glance...

FRESHPACK MULTI

Work of 4 now that of 1.
(3 people upskilled and
reallocated).

FRESHQUALITY

Online grading via touch screens.

EDI SYSTEM

Seamless integration with
customer’s platform.

LABEL PRINTING

Enables instant in-house
designs.

MANUAL DATA INPUT

2 hours a day saved.

ACCESS

Remote desktop or devices.
Up to 3 hours a day saved.

**Complete control
from soil to supermarket**



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