



Mildura Fruit Co.



AT A GLANCE

2.1 AMOUR MANDARINS A HIT AT COLES

The Amour range of mandarins, exclusive to Sunraysia and Coles, keep winter fruit sales ticking over.

2.2 WORLD'S BEST FOR COLES

MFC sends approximately 3.5 million cartons of fruit throughout the world each year, the very best of it goes straight to Coles supermarkets.

2.3 Q&A

How the relationship with Coles is benefitting MFC.

2.4 NAVAL GAZING

A look at the key numbers: 120+ growers; 3.5 million cartons of fruit a year; \$7 million in recent investment and six quality control check points to ensure only the very best fruit makes it to your shopping basket.

Coles customers en-amour-ed with Sunraysia mandarins

Coles customers have consistently been asking for a mandarin that is sweet, predominantly seedless, medium-to-large in size and easy to peel.

Thanks to the Mildura Fruit Company (MFC) they need ask no more.

The Amour mandarin, supplied exclusively to Coles by MFC ticks all the customers' boxes.

"It's a great quality mandarin," says MFC Senior Trader Marcus Scott.

"Exceptional quality."

Not only is the Amour mandarin a low-, or in many instances no-seeded mandarin, it also boasts a sweet, fleshy meat behind a deep-orange peel that is easy remove.

"It importantly also fills a gap in the season," says Marcus.

The Amour is a variety-in-a-variety, being a high-end, top-shelf derivative of the popular Afourer range of mandarins.

Locally-grown quality Simply the best

That Coles is the exclusive stockist of the Amour range further demonstrates the growing relationship between the two companies.

What once started as a "bits and pieces" relationship has over the course of 7-8 years developed into a commitment of such scope that it is skewing the philosophy of MFC to one that sees more and more of our best fruit stay in Australia.

"Traditionally, MFC has always had an export focus, with approximately 85 per cent of our fruit sent offshore," says Marcus.

"That's recently changed a bit, and Coles has played a crucial role in that philosophy.

"Their importance in the domestic

market, combined with the support they've provided us, has given us the confidence to renew our local focus – and it's something we look forward to continuing."

Driving innovation Extending support

The success of the Amour range of mandarins bodes well for other new varieties in MFC's pipeline that will extend the growing season.

"We've a product in production called the M7 early navel," says Marcus.

"It's a product of one of our growers, Chislett Developments, and is the world's earliest navel."

The M7 is described as having a rounder shape, preferred by retailers and consumers, together with a firmer fruit that gives it an extended harvest period, better handling and extended shelf life.

Coles will play a critical role in the success of the new variety, as with the Amour mandarin.

"When introducing a new product to market, there are two crucial factors," says Marcus.

"Consistent supply and consistent quality.

"These are the two things we can guarantee Coles, and they in-turn can guarantee their customers."

Marcus' comments are backed by the fact that only half of one per cent of MFC's product delivered to Coles doesn't make it to the shelves.

"The quality and reliability of our product has no doubt helped our relationship with Coles," says Marcus.

"We work hard to ensure that every tray we supply is of the same top quality as it was yesterday, today and will be tomorrow.



A - QUALITY ONLY THE BEST FOR COLES

Marcus Scott, Senior Trader at the Mildura Fruit Company, points out there are six quality control check points from when the fruit arrives at MFC to when it leaves for stores and markets.

“The first step is the fruit is categorised into A, B and C quality categories,” says Marcus.

“The A quality goes to Coles.”

Marcus says the MFC team is proud to pack for Coles, and their association with *MasterChef* and growing reputation for quality fresh food further enhances this pride.

A world leader in citrus Coles gets world's best

Mildura Fruit Company (MFC) is one of Australia's leading citrus packers and exporters, representing more than 120 growers throughout the Sunraysia region.

From its large packing-house in Mildura, MFC ships out approximately 3.5 million cartons of fruit each year to Australia and overseas markets – the best of which goes straight to Coles supermarkets.

Meeting growing demand Investing in the future

Through strong long-term and loyal relationships with their customers, such as Coles, MFC has been able to significantly invest in its operation.

MFC is one of the world's most technologically-advanced citrus packers, making extensive use of bar code scanning and computerised fruit sizing and sorting equipment.

In recent years, MFC has spent in excess of \$7 million on major

plant upgrades and shed expansion to cope with a steady growth in packing and marketing demand.

MFC's operation consists of two large capacity-packing lines that enable the full range of citrus products to be sorted and packed with little interruption throughout the busy navel season.

MFC employs 40 permanent staff and 150 casual staff to meet seasonal and shift requirements.

Importance to the region The heart of Sunraysia

Mildura is located in the heart of one of Australia's premium fruit growing areas – the Sunraysia district.

Clear days, an abundance of sunshine and the mighty Murray River have transformed an area surrounded by desert into a lush horticultural region.

While the Mildura district is small by world citrus standards, it has produced a number of very popular citrus varieties. The Leng Navel, Late

Lane Navel and more recent summer navels such as the Chislett, Barnfield and Rohde Navel all originate from mother trees in the Murray Valley.

“Our sunshine and cold nights make Sunraysia one of the best citrus growing regions in the world,” says MFC Senior Trader, Marcus Scott.

“We are certainly right up there with the larger regions in South Africa, California and the Mediterranean.”

While the region compares favourably to other regions throughout the world, there is still much they can learn from the other leading growing regions.

MFC employs John Chavarria, a consultant from Spain, for three months each year.

“John gets out to the orchards and works with growers to look at their product and ways which they can improve quality,” says Marcus.

“This is an area we don't compromise on as our product needs to be of the highest quality to get into the Coles tray.”

Q&A

with MFC Senior Trader, Marcus Scott

Does your relationship with Coles help provide further insights into the needs of consumers?

As our relationship with Coles continues to get better, so does the feedback we receive.

The communication is excellent.

We work very closely with them on specials and what times are best suited for our fruit. If we have a heavy week, they'll help us out with things such as more shelf space to promote (and sell) our fruit.

Coles also helps us with feedback from their consumers and suggestions to help us out with new product development.

How is Coles helping MFC with its overall business objectives?

Traditionally, MFC has always had an export focus, with approximately 85 per cent of our fruit sent offshore.

That's recently changed a bit, and Coles has played a crucial role in that philosophy.

Their importance in the domestic market, combined with the support they've provided us, has given us the confidence to renew our local focus – and it's something we look forward to continuing.

How important is Coles' commitment to running and co-ordinating a number of growers in different locations?

It's absolutely important.

In the past it was all a bit hit and miss – a bit one week, nothing the next and a lot the week after.

Now we have a long-term commitment and a number to work towards.

This provides us with the two things critical to the success of our company – consistency and growth.

A great example of the support Coles has provided is the program that allows us to spread our season in a light crop year (such as this season). This lengthens the season and reduces the need to import.

Does Coles commitment also help MFC continue to be at the forefront of new product varieties?

Yes it does.

Our growers are already proactive, but to be backed by a major supermarket like Coles provides the confidence for our growers to continue to invest in and trial new products.

As a result, we work with Coles quite closely during the process and their opinion is important as they are able to tap into consumer trends – something we hope to see over time with the Amour mandarin.

On varieties and innovation, are there any products other than Amour where you're looking to provide Coles with a point-of-difference?

We're constantly trialling new varieties – up to nine or ten each season.

Some of these won't be successful as they go head-to-head with the tried-and-true varieties, but there are a couple we're looking at that are early or late season varieties that also serve to extend the availability of Australian-grown fruit.

A variety that we're excited about is the M7, an early season navel that is looking very promising.





Building the relationship

Working closer with Coles

The Mildura Fruit Company (MFC) traces its history back more than 100 years to its origins as a Co-Op.

Over the last 7-8 years, Coles has played an important role in underpinning the success of MFC as it continues to grow and be a significant local employer.

“Initially we just supplied Coles with bits and pieces,” says Senior Trader Marcus Scott.

“But our relationship has continued to build over the years and we are now a volume-based supplier.”

As the relationship continues to grow, so does the collaboration.

Growing a better relationship

MFC prides itself on being a grower-orientated company.

“We have two service guys ensuring consistency in the fields,” says Marcus.

“They monitor the crops and help with forecasts and sizing – the more we can do to help them, the better it is for us.

“It also allows us to provide Coles with a consistent supply – and importantly, a consistent high quality.

One of the major benefits of Coles’ long-term commitment to MFC is that it allows both organisations to plan ahead, rather than operate on a week-to-week basis.

“Growing balanced crops of good sized fruit improves grower profitability,” says Marcus.

The single, most important factor governing market returns is fruit size, which is largely affected by crop load.

“Our field guys are in the orchards throughout November during the physiological fruit drop period to get an indication of the season’s crop.”

By using a 0.5m x 0.5m x 0.5m frame and counting all fruitlets inside, growers can get a good idea of crop load.

The earlier growers can identify a potential problem with size, the more opportunities a grower has to put into practice tools to achieve profitable yields.

This information is also passed onto Coles, allowing them to better plan and amend specifications if required.

“We now have seven years of historical data with Coles,” says Marcus.

“This provides us with a pretty accurate prediction about how the season will look.”



Marcus says MFC’s processes are as advanced as anywhere in the world and they are constantly travelling overseas to view the practices of other regions to ensure they stay ahead of the game.

“By sharing our intelligence with Coles and working closely with them, we both know exactly where we stand.

“And importantly, we both sell more fruit.”

NAVEL GAZING

3,500,000

The approximate number of cartons of fruit MFC delivers each year.

6

The number of quality control check-points from when the fruit arrives, to when it leaves the MFC factory.

120+

The number of Sunraysia citrus growers represented by MFC.

190

The number of people employed by MFC.

7,000,000

The number of dollars invested in major plant upgrades and shed expansion in recent years.

1

The number of supermarket chains that carry the popular and delicious Amour brand exclusive to the Sunraysia region.