

# Q&A

## with Tony Cummaudo

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

We work alongside Coles as we know that if we strive for quality, we'll increase sales at Coles – and that's good for us.

We work hard at providing Coles and their customers with a potato that will 'perform' every time.

That way people return to Coles because that's where they know they'll get the best potatoes – and that's a good thing for us.

### ***How is Coles helping Cummaudo Farms with the objective of growing the 'perfect potato'?***

Once again, we do a lot of work of Coles in this regard.

We've just started doing some taste tests with Coles and that's getting us thinking more and more about new varieties.

We're at the stage now where we're looking world-wide for new varieties.

There are a lot of varieties out there that have a fantastic taste, we just need to perfect the growing in Australian conditions.

And then there's the work we do on perfecting the existing varieties – the Nicola potato being a great example.

The Nicola is not at the waxy end of the scale, nor the floury end, making it not only a great tasting potato, but a very versatile one as well.

### ***Does Coles commitment also help Cummaudo Farms continue to be at the forefront of new product varieties?***

They help us in that they are always ready to listen.

We really appreciate that they back us to take the initiative on new varieties and then support us from there.

### ***On varieties and innovation, where is Cummaudo Farms looking to provide Coles with a point-of-difference?***

We've a few different varieties on the go, including one we're pretty excited about – the Golden Royal.

The Golden Royal, as the name suggests, has a more yellow flesh, which we see coming more and more into vogue among consumers... and that's because the taste is there.

We think it's important to remain at the forefront of new products, given the impact shows such as MasterChef has had on the population.

I reckon it's great that people are becoming more interested in using fresh, natural ingredients and thinking more about how they use them – they understand that cooking is not a chore and that it can be fun.

And now the MasterChef concept has been extended to encouraging kids to work with such ingredients and that can only be a good thing for growers such as us – particularly those supplying Coles.



# Fresh Select



## AT A GLANCE

### 2.1 CUSTOMERS ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO SUCCESS

Fresh Select's CEO John Said says his business relies on one thing. Customers.

### 2.2 SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION

As people become more and more interested in where their food comes from, interest in sustainability and eco-consciousness has also become more prevalent.

### 2.3 Q&A

Fresh Select's General Manager John Said on the relationship with Coles and how they are working together to benefit the consumer with fresher products and new varieties.

## It's all about you

Fresh Select's CEO John Said knows his business depends on one thing.

Customers.

"That's the focus," says John, "it's absolutely fundamental."

Fresh Select is an end-to-end fresh produce business – from the seed right through to customer satisfaction – producing a range of fresh produce, including lettuce, broccoli and cauliflower.

"We have to make very, very sure that the expectations of every step of the process are met and exceeded," says John.

### Product development An exciting time

"There are a lot of opportunities in new product development," says John, "and great diversity in our growing regions."

Fresh Select has its origins in two local businesses that have operated in Werribee (situated between Geelong and Melbourne) for 25 years. Since then it has added locations in Queensland and Western Australia to cover north, south east and west of the continent with properties close to central distribution centres.

"There's certainly a bit of a buzz around the place at the moment," says John – and it's a buzz he also sees at Coles.

"The innovation Coles has put in place for the next ten years is phenomenal," says John.

"That fresh produce is taking centre place in this rejuvenation is fantastic."

And it's not only what customers see in store.

"With Coles, we are now catching up with the rest of the world in terms of 'supplier development'," says John.

"This is a bold, innovative move by Coles – we are now talking more about 'relationships' between growers and buyers."

### A combined 50-year experience People

Fresh Select's two directors have a combined experience in excess of 50 years across all sectors of the vegetable industry – growing, wholesale and retail.

John, along with David Menegazzo, monitors the needs and requirements of all areas of the business.

"In this industry it is crucial to stay abreast of the changes and developments," says John. "This is best achieved by maintaining close and loyal relationships with growers, vendors, suppliers and customers."

During harvesting season, the Fresh Select 'conglomerate' can employ up to 200 people – all of whom play an important role in the continuing success of Fresh Select.

Along with an exceptional distribution and supply chain management system; the ability to provide year-round availability and most importantly, the consistent provision of first-rate, fresh produce, Fresh Select continues to be at the front of the industry not just in Australia, but internationally.

### Insight is the key Innovation

"Success in the fresh produce industry depends on insight – particularly into the market and adapting quickly to change," says John. *(cont. page 2)*



## SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION

As people become more and more interested in where their food comes from, interest in sustainability and eco-consciousness has also become more prevalent.

“Fresh Select attaches a great importance to environmental protection,” says John Said.

Many of Fresh Select’s growers have also embraced the use of recyclable water for their irrigation needs.

### Insight is the key Innovation

(from page 1) “It is our ability to recognise these changes, identify the opportunities for further development and our willingness to embrace new technology that has enabled us to become innovators and retain our position as a leader in the industry.”

Fresh Select was the first company in Australia to introduce the convenience and innovation of a vacuum-cooled bagged iceberg lettuce and bagged cauliflower.

“These products came about through extensive research, visiting overseas markets and working closely with packaging suppliers,” says John.

“This fits in well with an overarching philosophy to embrace technology and integrate it with the most modern growing and marketing techniques available to produce what the consumers

will need tomorrow – it’s how we stay ahead of the game.”

### Hand-selected Quality

“According to John, “nothing says first-rate quality like the Fresh Select brand.”

“Our produce is hand selected for consistent size, appearance and quality.”

Fresh Select’s cold chain management system ensures that when it hits the shelves at Coles, customers are presented with high-quality fresh produce.

### Clean and green Traceability

There is little doubt customers are looking more and more for locally grown produce.

“You go to the US and the ‘locavore’ movement is unmissable,” says John.

So much so that ‘locavore’ was the word of the year for 2007 in the Oxford American Dictionary.

The quality of Fresh Select’s produce can be traced right back to the grower through a reliable traceability program. The printed tags on all bagged produce provide reliable traceability of the product, right back to the grower.

“This fits in with one of the key tenets of what we’re trying to achieve with our suppliers – provenance,” says Greg Davis, Coles General Manager, Fresh Produce.

“Thanks to the MasterChef phenomenon and other factors, our customers are placing more and more attention on fresh food, and part of this is knowing where their food comes from.”





# Q&A

## with John Said, General Manager, Fresh Select

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

Absolutely.

We'll jointly conduct consumer insight studies with through a specialist looking at qualitative and quantitative information. In turn, we look at Coles and between us learn as much as we possibly can about our customers.

### ***How important is Coles in helping Fresh Select meet its business objectives?***

Very important – we have a shared vision, and that's vital if your to keep chipping away toward being the business you wish to become.

### ***How important is Coles' commitment in running and co-ordinating a number of properties in different locations?***

It is extremely important.

Put simply, without a commitment you just wouldn't do it.

### ***Does Coles' commitment also help Fresh Select be at the forefront of new products?***

Absolutely.

To turn around a product from its conception takes at least a year before it is commercial (and that's after the seed companies have trialled them). You need that commitment to be able to take the time to trial these new products.

### ***On product types and innovation, how are you trying to provide Coles with a point-of-difference?***

We are working very hard to keep Coles at the forefront of the lettuce category on three fronts.

First – in product availability. We grow in three locations which extends the growing season and places us close to major distribution centres throughout the country.

Secondly, we are at the forefront of new product development not just in Australia, but globally.

And finally, we've got history. We know our product and the industry inside out and use this knowledge to produce the very best produce you can get.



# Freshway Farms



## AT A GLANCE

### 2.1 LIVING UP TO ITS NAME

Established for more than 65 years, Freshway Farms has been home to three generations of Virginia farmers.

### 2.2 SHARING FRESHWAY'S SUCCESS

Freshway Farms has an extensive network and partnership with growers in the Virginia and Murray Bridge districts.

The vast majority of these growers produce their crops in protected environments such as glass and plastic-houses.

### 2.3 Q&A AND SOME STATS

Freshway Farm's Manager Tony Spano on the relationship with Coles and some stats that demonstrate the company's success.

## A farm that lives up to its name

Freshway Farms is a family-owned business located in Virginia – the heart of South Australia's horticultural region.

Established in 1944 and spanning three generations of farmers, Freshway specialises in growing and packing tomatoes, capsicums, cucumbers and zucchinis. The experience they've gained over 66 years of farming has cemented their position as a leading supplier of quality fresh food not just locally, but throughout Australia.

### Three generations of Virginia farmers

#### Ensuring continuity, quality and quantity

Along with its own farms, Freshway has established a strong grower network in the Virginia and Murray Bridge area through share-farming arrangements to ensure continuity of supply all year round.

“Strong relationships and a high degree of integrity and cooperation with members in the supply chain enables supply of a consistent quality product that best meets the needs of Coles' customers,” says Tony Spano, Freshway Farms' manager.

Food safety is also imperative to Freshway Farms, as it is to their customers, and for this reason they are fully accredited with SQF 1000 and Fresh Care.

### Securing their reputation Investing in the future

Far from resting on their laurels built over 60-odd years, Freshway Farms has a keen eye on securing their hard-earned reputation into the future.

“Freshway Farms' investment in a state-of-the-art refrigerated packing facility, equipped with the latest

computerised packing machines demonstrates our strong commitment to achieving the highest possible standard in the most efficient manner,” says Tony.

“It's all about ensuring that when a Cole's customer picks up a tomato, capsicum, cucumber or zucchini, they can be confident that it's as fresh as it can possibly be.”

### Modern infrastructure Flexibility the key

“At Freshway Farms, we understand that flexibility is the key to a dynamic market place,” says Tony.

“We believe that with our modern infrastructure and production volume, we are able to cater to the exacting requirements of our valued customers such as Coles, now and into the future.”

### Three fundamental forms of crop production

#### A three-pronged approach

Freshway Farms is unique among Coles' suppliers due to its direct ownership of the three fundamental forms of crop production in Australia today.

### Hydroponic greenhouse production

Freshway Farms strongly believes in moving with the times and embraces the latest in technological developments in the horticultural industry.

“This enables us to better fulfil the requirements of our customers,” says Tony.

“Our three greenhouses span 17,000 square metres and were erected for multiple crop plantings. *(continued page 2)*

*Tony Spano*

## SHARING FRESHWAY'S SUCCESS

Freshway Farms has an extensive network and partnership with growers in the Virginia and Murray Bridge districts. The vast majority of these growers produce their crops in protected environments such as glass and plastic-houses.

"Many of these growers have been associated with our company for generations," says Tony.

"Many of them also have entered into share farming agreements where we invest directly into each grower's crop to provide assistance."

This includes investments in areas such as seed varieties, fertiliser, irrigation issues and advice on controlling pests.

"We also have an experienced agronomist on hand to liaise with the growers," says Tony.

### A three-pronged approach Hydroponic greenhouse production

(from page 1) "The benefit of using these structures is that it suits the dry, hot South Australian climate."

The greenhouses are primarily used for the production of tomatoes (both truss and vine ripen), capsicums and cucumbers.

### Glasshouse and shade-house production

Freshway Farms owns 160 glasshouses which are primarily used in

the winter months for the production of gourmet tomatoes, capsicums and cucumbers.

"The benefit of this form of production is that the temperature remains relatively constant and obviously warmer than the outside conditions," says Tony.

Glasshouse production generally provides growers with higher yields as there is minimal damage caused by the elements such as wind and rain.

"During the past five years, with the help of government assistance, we've transformed our conventional glasshouses into hydroponic systems," says Tony.

"This has enabled us to increase our yield."

### Field production

Freshway Farms utilises 85 acres of farming land for the production of zucchini.

"Zuchinni production has been a great success for us as its yields have far outstripped those grown in other parts of Australia (when comparing acreage under plantation)," says Tony.

"This is largely credited to our ability to control disease and pests such as mosaic and thrip."





# Q&A

## with Tony Spano, Manager, Freshway Farms

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

Through the marketing and "at point of sale" marketing which Coles undertakes throughout its stores, we are able to gauge changing trends in buyer behaviour.

Coles being a national supplier of fresh produce allows our company to adapt its supply arrangements to suit these changes in the community, a perfect example is the cucumber category where ten or more years ago the green/Aussie cue predominately was sold, this has evolved with the needs of consumers to the wrapped continental and thinner Lebanese varieties.

### ***How is Coles helping Freshway Farms coordinate a number of properties and growers?***

Coles commitment to our company has allowed us to not only farm dual properties but commit to numerous growers and supply partners in the district, which is imperative when planning forthcoming seasons.

The commitment also gives us the confidence to invest in infrastructure not just at farm level, but also new machinery in our packing facilities in Virginia.

### ***How is your relationship with Coles helping you stay ahead in terms of innovation and the development of new varieties?***

Our relationship with Coles is one which encourages trial and innovation in the sector, our agronomist and partner growers do numerous experimental planting each year of new products in the various categories.

Particularly in the hydroponic sector, Freshway Farms works closely with all the major seed companies trialing different varieties of tomatoes, capsicum, cucumbers and eggplant with various degrees of success. However we never underestimate the importance of achieving the goal of commercially cultivating long lasting, tasty produce for the end consumer.

### ***On product types and innovation, how are you trying to provide Coles with a point of difference?***

Coles are leaders in the marketing and promotion of fresh produce in Australia, the point of difference can often be seen through its promotional activities. A current example which has been undertaken over the past few years is the "Movember" truss campaign which helps increase fund raising and awareness of men's prostate cancer during the entire month of November. This has been very successful both for promoting truss tomatoes and fund raising for such a great cause.

## FRESHWAY BY THE NUMBERS

# 17,000

The number of square metres covered by greenhouses for the production of tomatoes, capsicums and cucumbers.

# 66

The number of years Freshway Farms has been in operation.

# 160

The number of glasshouses primarily used in the winter months for the production of gourmet tomatoes, capsicums and cucumbers.

# 85

The number of acres used for the production of zucchinis.

# 3

The number of generations of the Spano family involved in Freshway Farms.

# 5

The number of years taken to transform Freshway's conventional glasshouses.

# Koala Country Orchards



## CHERRIES ON TOP IN HEALTHY EATING

Cherries are rich in vitamin C, fibre and phytonutrients, especially anthocyanidins which also give the cherry its red hue and promote cardiovascular health and memory function.

Cherries also provide beta-carotene, potassium, and quercetin. Quercetin is a natural antihistamine and anti-inflammatory bioflavonoid, thus cherries can lower the risk of asthma and some allergies.

A preliminary study by the U.S. Agricultural Research Service suggests cherries may reduce arthritic inflammation and other inflammatory conditions.

Cherries also contain melatonin as well as ellagic acid, a powerful anti-cancer compound. Further, cherries are high in malic acid, which is important in the production of energy and possibly beneficial for sufferers of fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome.

## Cherry picking the best produce for Christmas

The lead up to Christmas at Koala Country Orchards is a hectic time of year.

The orchard, whose main orchard lies on the Maroondah Highway in Yarck (approximately 150km north east of Melbourne in Victoria), sells twenty per cent of its cherries in a one-week period during the festive season.

“Our entire infrastructure is geared up for that week,” says Michael Rouget, Koala Country Orchard’s Managing Director.

While the Christmas week is vital to the orchard’s operations, Michael says its closer relationship with Coles is starting to give sales during other times of the year a lift.

“At different times of the year, we work closely with Coles on promotional activities to give sales a boost,” says Michael.

“The direct relationship we have with them allows us to work more closely with them in areas such as forward planning which then lets us to make the most of opportunities come harvest time.”

And so far all indicators point to some good opportunities this summer.

“This season’s looking good with a great crop,” says Michael. If we can get some dry weather at harvest time, it will be great.”

And Coles will be there every step of the way.

“We’ll meet again with Coles to confirm our initial thoughts around the harvest, so they can best plan for the coming months,” says Michael.

“Over the past couple of years, we’ve really developed more of a partnership approach with Coles in managing the category – and that benefits both of us.”

The more we foster the relationship, the more we can see the opportunities that exist for cherries,” says Michael.

“Five years ago, we weren’t in that position and we tended to speculate a lot more – the partnership we now have has given us a lot more confidence.”

### Investing in the future Expanding the orchards

“We’ve done a lot of development over the past five years,” says Michael.

“One of the most significant changes has been our investment into expanding into other areas – an early region and a late region.”

The early region is in Cobram, 200 kilometres to the north of the original orchard in Yarck, while the late region is a mere 40 kilometres up the road in Strathbogie. However the higher altitude (400 metres higher) of this region extends Koala Orchard’s growing season.

It also allows Koala Country Orchards to provide Coles with a longer line of consistent quality and volume.

### Innovation and quality of life Sustainable cherries

“We are committed to continue and improve our efforts of producing the highest quality cherries in an environmentally friendly and sustainable way,” says Michael.

“We also strive to maintain a position as industry leaders in fruit production techniques, fruit quality, packing, marketing, innovation, and business performance.”

Koala Country Orchards aims for excellence in every facet of their company.

“Not only do we want to provide our families and employees with financial security, but also continue to provide a great lifestyle and an opportunity to fulfil our professional and personal goals.”



## A FAMILY HISTORY

Koala Country Orchards is a family owned and run company with a proud history in the cherry industry.

In 1944 Reginald Rouget and his wife Mary purchased 26 acres of land in the township of Wandin in the Yarra Valley. There they planted various types of berries and cherries.

Their three sons John, Max and Brian left school at an early age to work hard on the family business. The company name 'R.J Rouget & Sons' was born and it became the cornerstone of the widely spread Rouget family. Wives, husbands, siblings, children and now grandchildren have worked in the business and taken with them fond memories of cherry time.

The tradition lives on today under the name 'Koala Country Orchards'. Upon migrating to Yarck, the new company name was inspired by the abundance of koalas inhabiting the property.

Now owned by John & Brian's sons and their wives, Simon and Alison & Michael and Lisa Rouget, and supported by a team of dedicated professionals, over 350 acres of cherries are farmed spanning seven properties throughout Victoria. Cherry harvest in the summer months employs up to 400 people, making Koala Country Orchards one of the largest cherry producers in the country.

### Innovation and quality of product A quality lifestyle

This quality of lifestyle is reflected in Koala Country Orchards' cherries.

"Exceptional tasting cherries are the cornerstone of our company," says Michael.

"Every decision from the soil to the box is directed toward achieving the highest quality eating experience for our customers, that's what drives us."

Koala Country Orchards continually develops efficient production methods, trial new technology, and explore new varieties from around the world to ensure our customers receive the best fruit available.

"It is the taste of the fruit that drives us," says Michael.

"From the ground up, keeping soils well balanced and biologically active, we aim for a quality product using sustainable practices. Our trees are pruned to produce premium cherries that are harvested as mature fruit for maximum flavour."

Once picked, Koala Country Orchard's hydro cooling maintains fruit quality, and a large packing staff at our one their centrally located packing facilities, ensures the consistency of fruit.

### Sustainability

#### Working with nature

"Sustainable farming practices underpin the quality and superior flavour of our fruit," says Michael.

"We are committed to preserving and working with nature as much as possible. Particular attention is paid to soil health with mulches and composts playing a key role in keeping our soils well balanced and biologically active."

Beyond the soil, extensive pruning and tree training techniques are used to maximise fruit size and quality. Fruit is harvested as mature as possible for maximum flavour, and post-harvest handling techniques are amongst the best in the world. Use of the most up to date hydro cooling, grading and packing equipment allows for gentle and precise handling of our premium product.





# Q&A

## with Michael Rouget, Managing Director, Koala Country Orchards

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

Yes. Coles has a great retail knowledge – they know what consumer expectations are as well as their buying habits. This enables us to grow the product the consumer wants, when they want it and maximise our sales.

While we have a pretty good indication on this ourselves, it does provide us with a lot of reassurance to have these insights confirmed. It helps us on the path to growing the right product the consumer wants – and that's the key to any business.

### ***How important is Coles in helping Koala Country Orchards meet its business objectives?***

To be successful in this business requires a very long-term view and a lot of planning. And it takes a lot of money and time – five to ten years – to get in a position to provide volume.

We saw a trend a number of years ago and took the punt. Having Coles recognise this and come on board with a partnership approach is great. We've worked hard to build recognition for our brand and this is something Coles has recognised and values – and as a result, sells more of our product.

This in turn has enabled us to become a direct supplier and that benefits us, Coles and the consumer.

### ***Does Coles also help Koala Country Orchards continue to be at the forefront of new products?***

Yes. New products are at the front of our minds. And although they are largely our initiative, by working closely with Coles and utilising their retail knowledge, we have a greater understanding of what lines consumers are interested in.

### ***On product types and innovation, how are you trying to provide Coles with a point-of-difference?***

Coles' initiative in sourcing more of their produce directly from suppliers is providing customers with fresher and cheaper produce. We are doing a lot of things with them, particularly in marketing and promotion. An example of this is the two-kilogram Christmas-designed box of premium-quality cherries. We're also doing a 400 gram premium punnet for Coles Finest Range, which will be available in stores where they know they have consumers interested in an upper-end product.

## SOME CHERRY PICKED STATS

### 20

The percentage of cherries sold in the lead-in week to Christmas.

### 66

The number of years since Reginald Rouget and his wife Mary bought 26 acres in Wandin.

### 350+

The number of acres now in production at Koala Country Orchards.

### 400

The number of people employed by Koala Country Orchards in the summer months.

### 2kg

The size of the special Christmas designed box of premium quality cherries exclusive to Coles this Christmas.

### 400m

The extra elevation at Koala Country Orchards' Strathbogie property that allows it to extend the growing season.



# 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, 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 Sheiparia, 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.”