

Innovation in Packaging within Fresh Produce

Within Fresh Produce, there are three factors driving innovation in Packaging. These are

1. Reducing Waste
2. Convenience for the consumer
3. The opportunity to build a brand

This brief report will review these three drivers of development and innovation within fresh produce packaging and discuss potential opportunities within the packaging sector of fresh produce.

Reducing Waste within the Fresh Food industry is an opportunity for firm's right across the supply chain to increase their bottom line. There are opportunities to have more efficient production methods, logistics and handling, as well as new and innovative methods of packaging to reduce waste.

Modified Atmosphere packaging is becoming increasingly popular around the world, because of its ability to extend the storage life and quality of fruits and vegetables by modifying the atmosphere surrounding products. Modified atmospheres can be achieved by using controlled atmosphere (CA) storage or modified atmosphere packaging (MAP). In China, passive MAP is extensively used to extend the shelf life of many fresh commodities and fresh cut fruits and vegetables because passive MAP presents a much more economical alternative approach to controlled atmosphere (CA) to extend storage life. (www.worldfoodscience.org, 2011) An example of MAP is PEAKfresh (convex plastics) - PEAKfresh is ideal for transporting bulk produce to markets, or between growing and processing points. Made from a mineral impregnated film that slows down the ripening process, PEAKfresh absorbs and removes ethylene gas given off by the stored produce, and maintains high levels of humidity. (Packaging Innovation, 2005)

Another example of reducing waste is an American and Europe approach to packaging in table grapes. Table grapes have, and still are sold in small convenient bags or in 10kg boxes. However an innovative practice has seen the grapes now sold in clam-shells. The clamshells protect the product, and hence less spoilage occurs between the paddock and the end consumer.

Understanding and targeting the wants and needs of consumers are very important to retailers retaining and creating more market share. Retailers and processors such as One Harvest have identified convenience is a key consumer want. Thus, the Fresh Produce industry has become increasingly innovative in ways to make their products more convenient for the consumer, to drive sales. There are many examples of this, such as the One Harvest Fresh Cuts packaged salad range which is sold through Coles and Woolworths.

There are opportunities to create and build a brand through packaging within the fresh produce industry. Traditionally, fresh food hasn't been branded, nor packaged. If it has been, the packaging has been predominantly see-through plastic bags or containers. The idea behind this type of packaging was to enable the customer to see what they were buying. However, in recent times

packaging has become more exciting, as firms investing in packaging have realised that there is an opportunity to promote their brand. Consumers that can relate to the brand name, and trust that the brand will meet their requirements will most likely continue to buy it.

As an example EDP Australia (A supplier of packaging solutions) has worked with numerous citrus growers that typically supply product in cartons through the wholesale market system. A particular grower who proudly grows “chemical free” citrus and has done so for years needed a way to get this message to consumers. This grower made a major investment in the most up to date citrus pre packing technology from edp and so became a grower packer. EDP was able to work with the grower to develop his own citrus pre-pack with a printed film that conveyed their message via a “story board”. This pack increased their market share of citrus sales by 25%. (Rob Anderson, Retail World Magazine 2011)

The three drivers behind innovation in packaging have so far been discussed as individual drivers. However they all interrelate to produce a product which meets the consumer’s requirements. Understanding the consumer’s wants and needs must be at the forefront of the Fresh Food industry. Presently, the cost of living is rising, which is seeing the consumer cut back on spending and reduce the amount of food they are wasting. Consumers are also demanding more convenient food solutions. These two consumer trends have paved the way for innovation within fresh produce packaging. Smaller fruit which may have been thrown out in the past is now being packaged in convenient sizes, long-lasting (map) packaging which is reducing waste, and saving time and money for the consumer. Not only this, but the chance to drive sales through brand recognition and trust through exciting packaging and advertising means packaging is a new and viable way to market the fresh produce.

The drivers behind innovation within fresh produce are now evident but the opportunities in the future are still unclear. New and exciting types of vegetable marketing within America such as Scarrots – baby carrots sold just like lollies around Halloween – have been successful and more of this type of fresh produce marketing through packaging will occur.

With more research and development, there is big potential to improve on the already successful modified atmosphere packaging which could be a major game changer in terms of how the whole supply chain is managed. If the fresh food is able to keep longer, then it allows flexibility within the markets and that would definitely change the way major supermarkets do business with their suppliers.

Companies such as ‘Neilson’ which are market research specialists are indentifying trends within the industry and helping to understand the consumer. This type of research will have a major influence on the fresh food industry, and it has been the consumer trends information which has seen innovation in the packaging of fresh food.

In conclusion, with more market research, improvements in technology and different types of marketing and advertising being adopted, the exciting methods of innovation within fresh produce packaging will continue on into the future. The exciting part though, is the many different ways in which it will be carried out.