



By Mike Knowles

Wednesday 16th September 2020, 17:04 GMT

Fruitbox: Will tech help us harvest better fruit?



Sun World International's David Marguleas explains why technology has such a vital role to play in securing supply

David Marguleas is chief executive officer of Sun World International, a leading developer of new table grape and stonefruit varieties based in California, US.

With a portfolio of premium varieties now being grown in an increasing number of new places around the globe, the enormous opportunities emerging for the group in terms of those products' considerable market potential are, Marguleas admits, accompanied by major new challenges on the production side.

Chief among those challenges is labour, be it the cost or indeed availability of workers to harvest and handle the fruit. "We've been struggling on these issues of availability of labour as well as increasing labour costs – particularly on these highly labour-intensive crops, like grapes, berries and stonefruit that are so dependent on the timely availability of

people to harvest and produce them," Marguleas explains. "But also the increasing cost in a number of places like the US, southern Europe and Australia, where the cost of these crops and actually getting them off the tree or the vine in a timely manner and into a coldstorage facility and through the supply chain is increasingly prohibitive."

For Marguleas, one important response has to be to invest in more advanced technology. "In particular, we think [there is a] need for more significant automation – not just in the packhouses but certainly in the fields – and looking at robotic harvesting capabilities for many of these labour-intensive and perishable crops," he tells Fruitbox host Chris White. "So we're excited about expansion not only of new growing locations but also new technologies that enable that and also new varieties that allow for the production of varieties that previously couldn't be grown in some areas."

Hosted by Chris White in London, Fruitbox now attracts a big audience across the global fruit and vegetable business that tunes in every week to hear exclusive interviews and expert analysis.

Produced by Fruitnet Media International, the show is essential listening for everyone in the fresh produce industry.

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