

For fresh fruit and vegetable marketing and distribution in Asia



By Liam O'Callaghan

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Montague starts work on new facility

New packing and distribution centre set to significantly upgrade the company's processing and export capabilities



Leading Australian fresh produce company, Montague, is a step closer to opening a state-of-the-art upgrade to its operations after breaking ground on the construction site at the company's headquarters.

The A\$54m (US\$37m) project comprises a new packing and distribution centre set to boost the company's production, export and storage capacity. It will also feature a community engagement centre and a research and development orchard for evaluating new varieties.

Once completed, Montague expects the facility to double its annual production capacity to 29,000 tonnes of apples and 5,000 tonnes of stonefruit and increase processing speed from 15-20 bins (21,700 kg) per hour to 60 bins.

The operation will feature a rapid cool room to facilitate exports and Australia's first fully automated high bay storage and retrieval facility, supplied by Dematic, with a 1,000-tonne capacity.

Some of the latest packing and sorting technology, from the likes of Compac, Burg, Newtech and Visy, will also be used in the facility.

Montague's general manager business development, Rowan Little, said the efficiencies this new facility will bring will be critical to growing the company's exports to Asia and supporting its domestic offering.

"The new capacity will give us the ability to export more easily, but still, 80 per cent of the product will be for domestic consumption," Little said.

"It will speed up the process, particularly for export containers. We are thinking it will drop the time it will take to pack a container of fruit for export from three days to six hours."

Little said as a vertically integrated company, Montague wanted to be world-class in every area and this project will bring its logistics and capacity in line with its orchards and marketing.

"Our last construction of a packing facility was in the 1980s so this really takes us the next step and really integrates everything and that is why we are excited," Little said.

Representatives from the Victoria-headquartered company were joined by local members of government and other stakeholders for the ground-breaking ceremony today.

Construction of the facility, which was made possible with assistance from the Victorian Government's Food Source Victoria programme, is expected to be finished in late 2020.

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