

For fresh fruit and vegetable marketing and distribution in Asia



By Matthew Jones

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## The Avolution targets waste reduction

### Leading Australian avocado marketer eyes growth with Escavox supply chain technology

One of Australia's biggest suppliers of avocados is stepping up its supply chain monitoring in a bid to improve fruit quality and reduce wastage.

Already supplying about 20 per cent of the Australian avocado market, The Avolution's decision to apply more analysis to its supply chain management, using the expertise of Australian company Escavox, may soon deliver greater access to export opportunities.

Antony Allen, chief executive of The Avolution, said the gains for his business would be achieved by assessing every link in the cool chain from packhouse to retail shelf and making quick adjustments as the information is relayed in real time.

"It's like closed-circuit television for your supply chain," Allen said. "For us it's a tool that gives us the information to share with all of our supply chain partners so that we can do better at every point of the supply chain journey.

"It's giving us the ability to refine and improve all of the supply chain management processes- essentially a whole of cool chain response that has quality for the consumer at its heart."

#### Seeing through 'virtual eyes'

The supply chain assessment has been made possible by the team at Escavox, a fresh food knowledge business established in 2018.

In that time, Escavox has developed its business model and proprietary hardware, known as the Escavox 'blue box tracker', which is deployed with selected produce.

The technology not only tracks the live movement of produce but also logs the conditions to which it has been exposed to as it travels from farm gate to retail shelf.

Nicola Sanderson, chief operating officer of Escavox, has overseen The Avolution's programme



(l-r): Antony Allen, chief executive of The Avolution, with The Avolution's co-owner and marketing manager, Gunjan Allen

since it commenced in March 2019. Sanderson said the service provided independent and objective data on the key areas impacting fresh produce quality post-harvest, relating to time, temperature and location.

"The data helps our customers maximise the quality and value of their fresh produce by allowing them to proactively monitor and optimise their cool chain performance" Sanderson said. "The live data is automatically compared to best practice post-harvest temperature so the impact to the produce can be assessed.

"Our customers then use the data in two ways: powerful and instant operational control through the live Escavox interface, and through our analytics portal to inform strategic decisions around cool chain capacity and capital investment."

Managing 2.5m trays of avocados a year, or 20 per cent of the Australian avocado crop, The Avolution has a massive

logistics network supporting the transportation of avocados from 120 farms in every mainland state to hubs in Brisbane and Melbourne, where the produce is consolidated under The Avolution brand and then re-distributed to fulfil orders in the retail, wholesale and foodservice channels.

Supplying the domestic market is a 12-month operation, with the peak of the season in northern Australia running from February to October, and Western Australia and southern Australia picking up from November to January.

Allen said the Escavox technology had given him and his team 'virtual eyes' over the logistics operation.

"The Escavox system gives you with pinpoint accuracy the information that enables you to go to the heart of a problem," he said.

"Nobody can tell you that it's not their issue when you have the independent information to hand telling you exactly what's gone wrong when it has occurred and where.

"It means everyone is on the same page when there's a challenge to be met or a problem to be addressed because you have a verifiable trace of where the product has been, how long it spent there and its condition through every step of the process."



With the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic currently straining international supply chains, Allen conceded his company may need to move slower on the international assessment. He acknowledges there is still more visibility of the domestic supply chain legs that can be achieved using the Escavox technology.

"We started this project with Escavox last year as a trial in New South Wales. We've now rolled this out to 50 per cent of our operation where we have a blue box tracker in every second pallet that leaves one of our 18 packing sheds across the country," Allen said.

"The next step is deploying one in the bin in the paddock at the time of harvest. We are really keen to start the monitoring as early in the supply chain journey as we can.

### Export expansion

Allen said the next step for The Avolution was deploying the Escavox technology inside its shipping containers bound for overseas ports, which currently include Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong.

The Avolution sends about 11 per cent of its inventory to these destinations, which equates to about one-third of Australia's exported avocados.

Allen is confident the data from the Escavox system will give him the intelligence he needs to expand the current international footprint.

"Once we have the data to hand, we will have a clearer picture of how we need to treat the fruit to maximise travelling distance while ensuring that quality is not compromised," he said.

"That will give us greater confidence when we assess who we can ship to internationally without compromising the integrity of our brand as a supplier of high-quality avocados. It opens up our options in terms of pursuing additional export markets in the future."

### A cool hand

Allen said the Escavox technology had also allowed The Avolution to work with its cool chain partners on a baseline refrigeration calibration to achieve temperature consistency on the journey from farm to packing hub and then onwards to the customer – a trip often in the order of thousands of kilometres.

"We would not have been able to take this request to our supply chain partners without this data and analysis from Escavox," Allen said.

"Temperature management on transport needs to be carefully watched, as do the points when food is moving from one point to another. This is where you're likely to get temperature inconsistencies.

"Ripening management is another area where we've been able to make some tweaks, especially as we move through the year and different varieties come onto the market, such as changing from Shepherd to Hass.

"We're looking to improve quality, improve compliance and reduce the anomalies. We want to treat the fruit in a way every time that allows for a consistency of high quality to be the most probable outcome."

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