



By Gabrielle Easter

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New model for farming unveiled

Australian Fresh Leaf Herbs has opened its greenhouse on the outskirts of Melbourne that uses technology to increase yields by 75 per cent



Australian Fresh Leaf Herbs' Jan Vydra (left) and William Pham

Herb producer Australia Fresh Leaf Herbs opened its state-of-the-art greenhouse in Clyde, just outside of Melbourne, on 2 March, which uses new cloud technology to increase yields.

The greenhouse was funded by Coles Nurture Fund, which provided a A\$430,000 interest-free loan to Australian Fresh Leaf, which has been supplying the retailer with fresh herbs for several years.

Australian Fresh Leaf developed the cloud-based technology itself, which uses large screens installed inside the greenhouse to advise employers when to plant, pick and pack each particular herb, which the company estimates will improve yields by 75 per cent.

Co-founder Jan Vydra said it was the first time that an Australian small business had used new cloud technology and Dutch-designed rolling benches to grow herbs.

"Two years ago, I saw the rolling benches in action in Holland and decide the benefits for yields and productivity were so impressive, we should introduce them to our business," Vydra said. "The combination of rolling benches, cloud technology and climate controlled greenhouse will increase our yields by 75 per cent by allowing us to increase annual yield from 350 bunches per square metre to more than 600 bunches."

"Australian Fresh Leaf herbs are great innovators in the industry. This new horticulture model

using the latest technology will mean our customers can buy great quality, locally grown herbs all year round at affordable prices," added John Durkan, Coles managing director.

"When we established the Coles Nurture Fund, this is exactly the sort of innovation we had hoped to support. We are delighted to see this landmark project come to life."

Vydra founded Australian Fresh Leaf Herbs with William Pham in 2008, and has since been supplying Coles both indirectly and directly.