



By Chris
Komorek

Tuesday 29th June 2021, 3:47 GMT

Rockit expands into Gisborne

Additional 40,000 trees to be planted across 20ha north of current base



New Zealand apple company Rockit Global (Rockit) has expanded into Gisborne, planting 20ha of its miniature apple variety, creating at least 20 jobs in the process.

The move north of its Hawke's Bay base comes amid an exponential growth period for the company, which currently packs over 100m apples per year from [its new global headquarters and state-of-the-art packhouse in Hastings, New Zealand](#).

Export demand for the sweet snack-sized apple is booming, and the company has identified the need to manage the risk associated with having most of its orchards in one region. As such, Rockit went hunting for fertile new ground to break, finding it in Tairāwhiti.

Chris Hurrey, Rockit Management Services (RMS) general manager, said 40,000 RMS-managed trees are ready to go in the ground this winter, filling 20ha just minutes from the city centre.

"In New Zealand, we're prone to adverse

weather events and environmental factors," explained Hurrey. "It's important to diversify our crop and spread our risk across several sites. Due to the slight difference in climate, establishing an orchard in Gisborne also allows us to provide early fruit to export markets hungry for access to our product as soon as it's available."

But the company isn't stopping its expansion there, having signed up for a further 45ha. Rockit plantings in this section will be managed by independent growers.

"We've been delighted with the support we have received from the region's growers," he said

Growing conditions in the region are perfect for Rockit, according to Hurrey. "Each growing area has different characteristics, but we're expecting ripe, sweet fruit with good colour. Gisborne is a proven horticultural region – one we're excited to be a part of."

Rockit's newest orchard will create a raft of senior and mid-level roles, as well as many seasonal roles.

"We're in the early stages of establishing a management team, but we'll also need orchard workers. This will open up a lot of opportunities for seasonal labour as well as full-time staff," explained Hurrey.

Finding a skilled orchard manager is the top priority for the company. "We're looking for someone who is great at working independently, self-motivated and disciplined – a person with a high level of horticultural experience. This is a prime opportunity for the right person," Hurrey outlined.

Gisborne fruit will be packed at Te Ipu, Rockit's 21,000m² packhouse and coolstore. "But if we get enough volume, we may look at establishing a second packhouse in Gisborne or Wairoa."

Rockit chief executive Mark O'Donnell said developing new orchards not just in New Zealand, but around the globe, will continue as demand for the miniature apples continues to swell.

"A move into Tairāwhiti helps support our growth, but it's also a chance to put down roots in one of New Zealand's

most beautiful regions," said O'Donnell. "There's so much energy, innovation and enthusiasm in Gisborne, and it's already attracting an influx of highly skilled people from around the country, looking for a family-friendly lifestyle and more sunshine hours.

"It's really exciting to expand our business into Gisborne thanks to the support of local growers, and we are thrilled to become part of the story," he added.

Enjoyed this free article from Produce Plus Magazine and its team of editors?

Don't miss out on even more in-depth analysis, plus all the latest news from the fresh produce business. Subscribe now to [Produce Plus Magazine](#).