

Gerawan Farming

Fresno, California

About Gerawan Farming

Gerawan Farming is the nation's largest grower of peaches, plums and nectarines and is one of the world's largest table grape growers. Operating since 1938, Gerawan Farming always strives to set the industry standard for best cultural practices. In doing so, the company grows, packs and ships only the fruit from its own orchards. Each day, 100,000 boxes of fruit are packed, with the fruit in the last box as high quality as those packed in the first box.

Gerawan Farming has a diverse group of high-end customers located throughout the country and internationally. To accommodate the diverse preferences of buyers within its industry, Gerawan Farming offers a variety of packing sizes and styles. The company prides itself on producing a premium end product. Therefore, gentle handling is critical throughout harvesting, packaging and shipping to optimize both the protection and presentation of the product.

Challenge

Several years ago, in response to the marketplace's request for a "riper" product, Gerawan Farming decided to locate its packaging facilities in the middle of its fields. The new location of the facility allowed for immediate packaging after the product was picked and collected in buckets. This process ran contrary to the industry's standard practice of transferring fruit from buckets (or bags) to large bins, which were then transported to central cooling and packing facilities.

Although the new packing process allowed Gerawan Farming to pick and pack a more mature (ripe) product, it was a risky move. Fruit waiting to be packed was not protected by the normal "pre-cooling" process (i.e., quickly decreasing fruit temperature for long-term storage), and packaging line downtime could result in significant loss of product. Additionally, the picked, ripe product required gentler handling throughout the packing and handling process.

The company also wanted to increase its packaging line efficiency to offset increasing labor costs and

At A Glance

Challenge: Packing a growing volume of ripe fruit without the normal "pre-cooling" process. Need gentle handling and low labor cost.

Solution: Gentle, efficient conveyor system and more flexibility and control with additions to the Tompkins Control System (TCS).

improve working conditions for its packaging line employees.

Gerawan Farming's challenge was to design and operate new packaging facilities that combined gentle handling with exceptional reliability to protect a more delicate, premium product. As part of this challenge, the company needed a larger, packed-box conveyance system to handle its diverse mix of packaged product as gently and efficiently as possible. Gerawan Farming called upon Tompkins Associates (Tompkins) to help with this unique challenge.

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“The new additions have given us more flexibility as well as more control over our systems. And, with Tompkins guiding us, we were able to save money while maintaining product quality.”

Dan Gerawan, CEO
Gerawan Farming

GERAWAN FARMING
established 1938

Background and Solution

For the initial implementation project with Gerawan Farming in 2001, Tompkins was asked to design and integrate a line that was ergonomically superior to “standard” conveyor lines, with minimal noise levels, efficient workstations, excellent reliability, and at a nominal cost.

After performing various tests at Tompkins’ Emerging Technology Center (ETC), the company selected and recommended a conveyor system comprised of a motorized drive roll (MDR) conveyor and a MDR sorter, which provides the best protection for product boxes by no-contact accumulation.

Gerawan Farming’s continued success with its MDR conveyor systems and “decentralized” packaging lines led to the expansion of its operations and a continued partnership with Tompkins.



Besides providing new conveying line systems for each additional packaging line, Tompkins also provided the software and controls for the conveyors and sorters, utilizing its middleware application, the Tompkins Control System (TCS). The TCS provides a graphical display and operator interface for running and trouble shooting the conveyor system, as well as an interface to the supervisory control graphic that oversees the entire packaging line.

For the packaging lines, Tompkins built a small line near Gerawan Farming’s cold storage plant as well as a larger line at another nearby facility, which replaced an older, smaller one. Later, Tompkins moved the first smaller line to the new location and subsequently provided the conveyor for an additional large packing facility.

Tompkins also implemented a “packed-box tally system” to track individual packer productivity and quality on a real-time basis.

Project Summary

- Motorized Drive Roller (MDR) Conveyor
- New conveyor line systems for each additional packaging line
- Tompkins Control System (TCS)
- Track packing productivity

For the most recent implementation, Tompkins teamed with Hilmot Corporation, a comprehensive conveyor supplier, to help Gerawan Farming keep conveying system costs low while continuing to provide all the advantages that MDR conveyors offer. To maximize savings, Gerawan Farming performed the systems’ installation with direction from Tompkins.

The Results

Tompkins’ conveyor solution is a flexible platform that handles a wide variety of packaging styles simultaneously. The no-contact accumulation feature of the MDR conveyor eliminates jostling of product and damage to containers due to excessive line pressure.

Inherent control features of the MDR allow workstations to be fed and operated efficiently by employees without adding secondary systems and unnecessary costs and complexity. In addition, the conveyor noise throughout the system is undetectable above the ambient noise from other portions of the line. It also uses less energy (30-50% depending on the application) than a traditional line.

The partnership between Tompkins and Gerawan Farming has created a flexible and affordable solution, allowing the fruit grower and distributor to implement high-quality, efficient conveying and sortation systems for its packed boxes on aggressive schedules and budgets.



Innovative, practical solutions that improve supply chain performance and produce value-based results

Tompkins Associates designs and integrates global end-to-end solutions for companies that embrace supply chain excellence. For more than 30 years, Tompkins has evolved with the marketplace to become the leading provider of global supply chain services, distribution operations consulting, technology implementation, material handling integration, and benchmarking and best practices. Headquartered in Raleigh, NC, the company is known for innovative, practical solutions that improve supply chain performance and produce value-based results. For more information, visit www.tompkinsinc.com.