

## Scaling Up: Helping a fruit processing company build their productivity

We were invited to talk to the owner of a small business which manufactures products from locally sourced fruit. The company has a variable workforce with only a few key people and saw opportunities to develop its productivity and some new product lines. Not only did the owner not have time to focus on making this change, but he didn't really know how to go about defining it or what options were available. They didn't know who could help them articulate the problem or manage a solution.

This is their story:

*"I run a small business based on a rural business unit which manufactures fruit products. We operate seasonally, with major activity during the fruit picking season up until Christmas, and then a quiet period of background dried fruit packaging."*



*"Our workforce varies throughout the season; we have a core of loyal employees who like to work seasonally, but the bulk are imported labour, school leavers, overseas etc, and this changes from year to year."*

*"Each season we have to train the new employees and because they are only with us for 4 months the calibre is quite variable."*

*"I have some new product ideas that will make use of the packaging plant throughout the year, whilst the existing process plant use can be extended by*

*using preserved fruit for a different set of product lines, and there is an option to bring in new machinery. Our space is limited, although we can fit everything we need into the existing location by taking on the adjacent unit if we wanted. However, we are quite remote, so the idea of a location nearer to transport and employment pool is attractive, but I don't know how to weigh it up."*

*"I can work out the costs, and I know what our manufacturing processes are. I don't know what steps are required or how to go about either option to be able to select the best one for the business, so at the moment nothing is happening."*

*"If an advisor could talk us through the project(s) and provide us with a realistic plan, then I can go to the banks with a proposal that looks professional and that I can cost up. However, we have looked for that sort of advisor, and they are often based around business investment and wanting to sell us a product, or it's not clear what expertise they have in our sort of industry."*

*"Our local business forum then suggested I contact Peter Francis at MAT Ltd, who specialise in identifying, planning changes in processes."*

In this case the client was expert in the production of their fruit processing lines but was time-poor in being able to make the improvements that he wanted.

Because the labour varied throughout the year, the management team had to provide the short-term backup, so could never dedicate a block of time to execute any major plans. As a consequence, they were falling behind in their growth potential.

Our involvement took away the worry of having to plan and manage a significant change.

Having identified the key employees with the hands-on knowledge of the processes, we brought together the information required to map out a realistic route to improvement, and in the process enabled these experienced employees to contribute their own ideas and even to get excited about the coming changes.

With our client now able to focus on operating the business, we assembled a package of front end design, identified the equipment and created a plan to achieve the new changes with minimal disruption to their existing production schedule, which provided a sound justification to be able to present to the banks.

In the final outcome, some of the new equipment in our proposal wasn't actually installed, as we demonstrated that production could be increased mostly by using the existing plant in more efficient ways.



Because we used the key employees in achieving the changes, they stepped up to take on additional responsibilities, which released the owners to be able to focus more on future strategic plans.

Even though some proposed new equipment wasn't installed, the agreed repositioning accommodated some future expansion so that further changes could be made with the least disturbance.

MAT recognises that in many cases improvements need to be made in stages, so we tailor our advice to suit what works for the company and its order book.

If you recognise this scenario or just want to know more, contact MAT for advice on how your processes can maximise their potential.



**SOLUTIONS**

**MAT Ltd**

Tel: +44 1905 888174  
Web: matl.co.uk  
e-mail: engineering@matl.co.uk

**HOW CAN WE HELP?**

**NOT JUST ANSWERS**