



Customer story



Special Fruit



The fruit & vegetable sector is a day-by-day business with unpredictable supply.

'Our aim: the right figures'

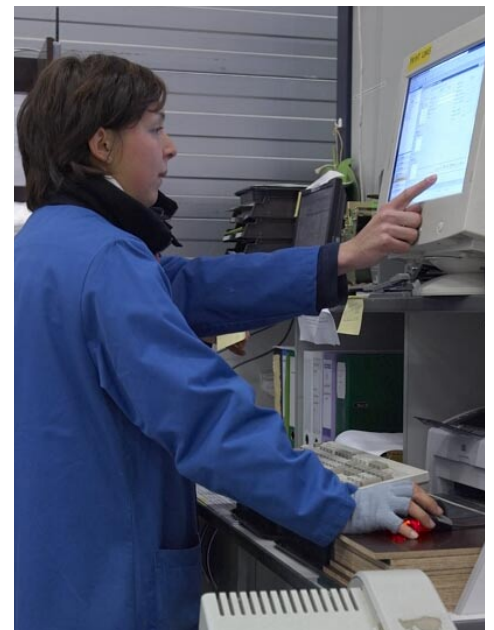
Special Fruit in Meer, the Netherlands, is a worldwide importer specialising in exotic varieties of fruit and vegetables. From currents and berries to exotic fruits and specialities. Our local presence combined with worldwide contacts enables us to achieve an ideal balance between supply and demand all year round. 'We started out in 1976 with the promise to supply fresh strawberries all year round, which we achieved by importing them from Florida,' explains Patrick Maes, managing director. 'We now import and export about 25,000 batches of fruit and vegetables from all over the world.' Special Fruit distinguishes itself with its product range of the more exclusive types of fruit and vegetables. 'Our name says it all,' Maes continues. 'Our business process is characterised by small orders and high volumes of transactions. No two orders are the same.'

Dynamics

Maes: 'The small orders and high volume of transactions indicate the dynamics of our company. The fruit & vegetable sector is a day-by-day business where the supply is always unpredictable. In order to dispatch the fresh products in small quantities and in customer specific packaging, we need an excellent internal organisation. We deliver to retail, wholesalers as well as to food service companies, and each channel has its own wishes and requirements. If we look at the trends, I can only expect the pressure on our logistics processes to continue increasing. Consider for instance the 'ready to eat' concept. This means, for example, that only mangos that are ripe and ready to eat should be on the shelves.'

An integrated ERP system

'So it was hardly surprising that we needed a new ERP application,' Maes continues. 'In the past we had separate systems for the administration and the logistics processes. We really wanted to have all this in a single integrated application so that we could have better and faster insight into the results per lot and so that the whole process would be more manageable. Furthermore, we wanted to reduce the amount of paperwork. It is exactly the automation of the lot administration that is so complex and this is not catered for in the standard ERP applications. Because there are more companies in the fruit & vegetable sector in the Netherlands than in Belgium, we looked for a Dutch supplier who understands our sector. And that is how we found Schouw Informatisering.' In the meantime Schouw has opened an office in Belgium, named Strategic IT.





Development of SI Foodware - Lot administration

Schouw Informatisering proposed to tackle the implementation as a real project and Maes missed that pragmatic approach in other suppliers: 'Schouw has a no-nonsense culture and a real drive to reach the finish. And that appeals to me.' When Special Fruit first came into contact with Schouw, they were already working on standardising their sector specific solutions in SI Foodware®. Maes: 'We seized the opportunity presented to work together on the development of the lot administration. We had already drawn up an extensive internal analysis of the business process. We were able to use this to make the translation to SI Foodware - Lot administration. We worked on this together with Schouw for two months. The result: a fully integrated lot administration in Microsoft Dynamics® NAV, in which we have now processed 15,000 lots in just 5 months. On average we process more than 100 lots a day.'

Live in the busiest period of the year

Special Fruit went live with Dynamics NAV and SI Foodware on 2 May 2006. 'We chose this date because 1 May is a national holiday in Belgium. The first month was hectic. In hindsight it transpired that May was one of the busiest months ever for Special Fruit. The Schouw and Special Fruit teams knew that the application was robust and they were ready to tackle any errors that might arise. After a month the system was living up to our expectations.'

Progress: the right figures

'Now, after more than six months, I see that we have made considerable improvements. In the past we didn't have an integrated system, we used to spend a great deal of time combining data manually; for example, it took two people about two weeks to calculate the actual monthly figures. We can do this much faster now. On the other hand we have to enter more information up front, and this takes a little more time, but in the end it's all about getting the right figures, and we use these to manage the company. In other words: we have jumped the first hurdle now, but Special Fruit still has a long way to go. We are a rapidly growing business and are constantly changing, and so our ERP system has to be flexible too. Special Fruit wants to move forward, and luckily for us, Microsoft and Schouw want that too. We are currently working on the implementation of the transport planning. This always depends on the supply, and in our line of business this is rather unpredictable. We are trying to streamline this where possible.'

Change over together quickly

'Looking back, there were a number of lessons to be learned,' explains Maes. 'I will never be able to emphasise the importance of a preliminary study enough. It was also invaluable to us that our personnel were well-informed about Dynamics NAV at an early stage. After all, your own people know your company best and if they can also make the transition to Dynamics NAV that just saves time. It works the other way round too: it's just as important that your implementation partner knows and understands your sector too. And Schouw does, they know the financial and administrative aspects as well as the logistics of fruit and veg. So this meant that we could change over together quickly.'

Patrick Maes, Managing Director:

'Now, after more than six months, I see that we have made considerable improvements.'