

Fresh Under Pressure



Real-time decisions drive produce quality during demand spikes

Background

As one of the world's leading produce providers, Delano, Calif.-based Wonderful Citrus is accustomed to keeping a close watch on every step of their production processes, regardless of whether that is at their domestic or international plants. According to Jeff Steinfurth, the director of transportation for Wonderful Citrus, ensuring cold chain integrity through the entire lifecycle of the product is one of the company's foremost objectives — and something that separates Wonderful Citrus from other providers.

“Having real-time visibility and temperature monitoring of our loads in the U.S., Mexico and abroad is the key objective of the transportation team. Our supply chain affects every aspect of our business and the success of our brands at our customers' locations,” said Steinfurth.

The company ships more than 450 loads of fresh citrus per day, and each commodity must be kept within an ideal temperature range to ensure the premium quality that its customers expect. Since 2017, Wonderful Citrus has been using Emerson's GO Real-Time trackers and loggers and the Oversight 2 portal to monitor the temperatures, locations and transit times of its shipments. Its Wonderful Bees division has utilized Emerson's solutions and services since 2015 to track and monitor loads of bees sent to pollinate their citrus and nut trees.

Challenge

Sales surge creates logistics challenges

With the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020, the entire food supply chain was subjected to significant disruptions. Many providers struggled to keep pace with demands as pandemic-related fears drove historic spikes in retail sales. At the same time, restaurants were closing and the demand for foodservice shrank very quickly. Within the U.S., the timings, reactions and impacts of this pandemic also varied greatly among states and regions.

During the surge, Wonderful Citrus did everything possible to meet customer demands. However, when their DCs reached capacity — and were asked to hold loads on the trucks for three to nine days or temporarily close — the transportation team needed to quickly figure out how to manage these shipments and their perishable cargo.

Steinfurth said that there are significant food safety and product quality risks with leaving product on trucks for that long. In addition, allowing valuable product to age on trailers when other customers were out of stock simply was not an option.



Solution

Calling real-time audibles to protect shipments

To help keep produce fresh under these demanding conditions, Steinfurth's team leveraged the robust functionality and real-time visibility provided by Emerson's real-time tracking and monitoring solution. "Holding shipments for three to nine days while DCs were full was not an option, so we used the technology to call real-time audibles," said Steinfurth.

Wonderful Citrus had recently upgraded to the Oversight 2 portal, so Steinfurth's team was able to visually monitor a live map overlay of trucks en route to full DCs, and then reroute shipments directly to nearby customers or other receiving centers.

"Our ability to bypass full DCs, reroute to other customers within 50 miles, and get product sold and on the shelves was very easy," said Steinfurth.

In addition, this was the first time that Wonderful Citrus' sales team was aware of the ability to see shipments en route and explore nearby sales options. It was essentially a matter of determining where they could sell those extra loads, and then making calls to alert available customers.

"The ability to see our trucks marching across every highway in the U.S. became a fun and invaluable tool for our sales team," he said.

Both the GO Real-Time tracking devices and the Oversight 2 portal are fully integrated into Wonderful Citrus' transportation systems and processes to provide tracking and monitoring information, notifications and alerts. Data from the Oversight 2 portal is also used to generate automatic reports and help with addressing customer claims, disputes and quality control issues.

Result

While the Emerson solution proved essential during the March 2020 sales surge, Steinfurth said that its value is equally as important during normal day-to-day operations. "One major advancement we have made as a company over the last six months was to give our production and sales teams much better ETAs (estimated times of arrival) for all import loads from Mexico to the U.S.," he said. Steinfurth added that the implementation of Emerson GO Real-Time trackers with light-detection capabilities has provided an additional layer of load security in the Wonderful Citrus supply chain.

As for the Wonderful Bees division, it continues to utilize Emerson's managed services to monitor and track its critical bee shipments. This turnkey suite of services leverages a dedicated team who continually responds to alerts and manages the activities related to ensuring optimal conditions for in-transit bees.

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Emerson GO Real-Time tracker unit