



# Perth to gain professional pre-pack facility

Valleyfresh chairman Garth Lockyer and Grant Etherington of third-generation family-owned wholesaler Etherington speak to Produce Plus about their new Perth-based joint venture, Packing Station.

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Western Australia, and that's something that doesn't exist yet in the market – a third-party service provider."

Building on a 15-year relationship, both Valleyfresh and Etherington have seen a growing demand for a professional pre-packing business in Western Australia.

"Pre-packing is a tricky business and there can be severe consequences if you don't get it right," says Lockyer. "Working with Etherington, we have the combined expertise to make this joint venture successful, and we feel the timing is right."

"We're confident about the opportunities for pre-packing in Western Australia," adds Etherington. "Valleyfresh already has a significant supplier base that are interested in this service in Western Australia, so we foresee more than enough demand."

"Customers can see the opportunities for pre-packing, but they don't exist in Western Australia yet. They know Valleyfresh, and they know Etherington, so Packing Station offers a great opportunity for our eastern seaboard customers to now have the confidence to go west," says Valleyfresh account manager Simon Powell. In such a geographically isolated market, taking three days to transport fresh produce from east to west, Powell says it's never been much of a viable option to ship pre-packed goods from its Sydney and Melbourne facilities to Perth.

Once Packing Station is up and running, Etherington will continue its operations at Perth Market City, while Valleyfresh will continue its local and international operations, having recently expanded its Melbourne facilities by another 1,400m<sup>2</sup> in December 2014. The Perth joint venture adds to Valleyfresh's operations in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, representative offices in Peru and South Africa, and its US subsidiary Valleyfresh North America.



**A demand for professional pre-packing facilities on Australia's West Coast has sparked the new joint venture between Melbourne-headquartered importer-exporter and third-party service provider Valleyfresh and Perth-based wholesaler Etherington.**

Packing Station will open its doors at Perth Market City's newly constructed warehouse space, known as E7, on 1 May this year, offering pre-packing services and storage for third parties.

Valleyfresh chairman Garth Lockyer says the two companies have been mulling the project over for the past 12 months, with machinery now on its way from Italy to the custom-built 900m<sup>2</sup> facility, complete with cool room facilities and loading docks.

Citrus pre-packing will be the focus in the early days of the operation, which will eventually add other products to the

mix, while also operating as a third party provider for pre-pack, storage and distribution needs. In terms of pre-packing, Packing Station will offer flow wrapping, net bags and strip bands for fresh produce, in a quality controlled, temperature controlled environment.

Valleyfresh will send experienced staff to Perth to train staff at Packing Station, with Etherington to bring in more people as the facility builds. The emphasis will be on keeping the station independent, with both Etherington and Valleyfresh to utilise the facilities as paying customers.

"I think the third-party service is the real selling point, and hopefully we'll have the machines running 12 months of the year," Grant Etherington of wholesaler Etherington tells Produce Plus. "It will be an independent packer and service provider for national suppliers targeting supermarkets in



**(picture 01)** Grant Etherington, CEO of Etherington (left) and Garth Lockyer, chairman of Valleyfresh

**(picture 02)** The facility will offer pre-packing including net bags, strip bands and flow wrapping

**(picture 03)** Valleyfresh and Etherington will operate Packing Station as an independent, third-party service provider