

SQF Case Study – Stemilt Growers, USA

In the North-West of the USA, between Seattle and the Rockies, there are extensive fruit growing areas around the Columbia River. **Stemilt Growers** is one of the largest growing and packing operations in the area. Its principal pack house is in Wenatchee where it has held its SQF Certification since 2001. At that time there were just 5% of local fruit pack houses working with the program. This has now grown to 95%

The cherry season, starting in June, is their busiest time and there can be 2,800 staff working in the pack houses. During the apple and pear season the numbers drop down to 1,400. In 2007, the sales turnover was \$170m. Its number-one customer is Wal-Mart but Stemilt supplies private label fruit to ten other retailers. In 2002, 3% of domestic turnover was in private label. Now this has increased to 20%. The main export customer is the Canadian retailer, Loblaw's. Stemilt also sells fruit to 20 other countries.

“ SQF can be applied throughout the food chain, for both primary production and manufacturing, and that allows for seamless and practical certification. The sector specific guidelines enhance SQF by providing greater transparency and it gets suppliers more involved in the process. It only makes sense to work together to ensure we all agree on the best practices needed to keep our food safe.”

Jill Hollingsworth

Group Vice President, Food Safety Programs & Safe Quality Food Institute, Food Marketing Institute



Eva Lauve
Food Safety Manager

Eva Lauve is the Food Safety Manager and has been involved with the SQF program from the start. *“Working here is great, every day is different and there always seem to be plenty of opportunities to improve and grow. We chose the program because it was right for the business. In the nineties I think the retailers used to assume food safety was being managed. In reality some were doing a great job but others had less control. Now, they always ask us. Our SQF credentials help us show them how we work.”*

Putting new systems into place can be a real challenge. Eva overcame resistance by involving the team. The work procedures were written by the actual employees who did the job. She says: *“It eliminated a lot of paperwork. That was a win for the teams in the pack house and in the orchards. We also found that we were able to improve our training programmes. It’s definitely better and quicker because we are always prepared. We now provide a much improved learning tool.”*

We made savings in the packing process too and have improved our efficiency by 20%. The programme opened our eyes to our own work. It helped us think about what we’re doing and why we do it. We review each product every year in line with the program’s requirements. This drives our continuous improvement.”