

## TECHNOLOGY

# Technology making waves

Trade Waves continues to stay ahead of the competition in terms of new technologies, as quality control takes centre stage

**At the close of 2006, as exporter Trade Waves continued its hunt for increased quality, it elected to form a partnership with an Italian supplier to trial a new covering system for grapes. The results of the trial, according to general manager Ahmed El-Hodaiby, were a marked improvement in grape quality and an early harvest.**

"The covered grapes were harvested 20 days earlier than the regular harvesting schedule dictated," reports Mr El-Hodaiby. "Egyptian grapes are commonly harvested at the beginning of June, but with the new Italian covering technology the season was brought forward to mid-May. This is a crucial extension for varieties such as Sugraone and Flame Seedless, which both last only until the start of July."

Understandably, Trade Waves has plans to continue these trials and it intends to

the company implement a new E-Trace system costing US\$65,000, including hardware, software, training and implementation of the electronic traceability system.

"The new system enables us to trace each pack back to the field," explains Mr El-Hodaiby. "The unique scannable barcodes allow the production, treatment, chemical application, cooling and transport history to be readily retrieved."

Such steps have been crucial in meeting the stringent standards set by the company's main markets, the UK, the Netherlands and Italy. Even a new, growing market such as Russia, less renowned for its demanding requirements, has been treated in the same vein.

"In the UK, we supply only supermarkets," says Mr El-Hodaiby, "which means that conforming to high quality

high quality the company aims to grow over the years to come.

Demand for the company's products has steadily risen in recent years, according to Mr El-Hodaiby. He cites several reasons for this trend, not least the expansion of the European Union and the overall increase in fruit and vegetable consumption caused by increased health awareness on the part of the public at large.

Exports for 2007 are up by 30 per cent in volume and 65 per cent in value compared to 2006 levels. Seedless grapes account for 1,000 tonnes of the company's exports, followed by pomegranates with 400 tonnes and capsicum with 300 tonnes.

"The market has developed well over the 2007 season, and the overall market perspective is extremely encouraging," says Mr El-Hodaiby. "Finally, following three consecutive seasons of poor prices, they have risen to a reasonable level this year.

"We are striving to expand our supply capacity by increasing our number of growers. However, the idea is not just to find new growers, but also to develop their capabilities and to improve their operations. This means a commitment to continuous training, experience sharing, quality supervision and close monitoring of the entire process."

With regard to the growing number of international supermarket chains targeting the Middle Eastern market, Mr El-Hodaiby has a positive outlook, citing the new chains' success in developing consumption of fruit and vegetables and increasing awareness.

"The Middle Eastern fresh produce industry is expected to keep on growing and developing," he says. "Growers and exporters are gaining experience and constantly developing in order to remain competitive and increase demand. New investments help to accelerate this development.

"We have our own long-term development plans. They include the introduction of new technology, the development of packaging procedures and the introduction of new varieties to meet our clients' requirements. As with all development plans, we intend to keep a close eye on quality, while continuing to build on the reputation of our Fruit Waves brand."



Staff, partners and visitors at Trade Waves' stand at Fruit Logistica 2007 in Berlin

enlarge the area that is covered using this new technology. Others also stand to benefit from such technological research since, according to Mr El-Hodaiby, Trade Waves means to share its experience and findings with other Egyptian growers.

Technological advances are clearly at the heart of the firm's agenda, and 2007 saw

standards is never negotiable. Conversely, the Russian market is highly competitive with regard to price, so we have countered this difficulty by supplying only high-class produce that few in the region can match."

In the Netherlands, Trade Waves relies on the recognition of its Fruit Waves brand, whose reputation as a mark of consistently