



## **Ebusiness technologies: foundations and practice**

*The lettuce supplier*

### **Michael Hale**

There is all year round demand for lettuce. It tends to reach its peak - apart from Christmas week which is a very busy week for us - it tends to reach its peak demand in late May and early June, which is (when) there is a chance of getting some good weather depending on the year and it's also when people like to have barbecues. After the long winter lay up they want to have something different and they- they tend to have salads along with barbecues so that's where we really come in. People expect to have the same varieties of lettuce all the year round now. They, they don't expect not to have Iceberg in the supermarkets. It's, it's a 'must have' product. We provide it by using the farms in the UK from the period mid-May until end of October harvest and then from the end of October through to the following May. We use our supply farms in Spain to- to make up the rest of the year's offer, growing the same lettuces out in Spain and just importing them.

### **Narrator**

Here are some of the lettuces imported from Spain.

### **Jamie Murphy**

Well basically at this point we are looking at all the products to make sure there is no defects with it and it's within the specification.

We have erm a set sample size that's agreed with the customers. For example if we had sixty boxes come in we'd get at least four boxes from those and so it's a representative size of the overall amount that comes through the door. Erm - it can vary up to fifteen to twenty boxes if you have got a full lorry coming in, and obviously as we go through those, if we find any problems with the lettuce, then we will double the sample size and look at forty boxes instead and make sure that we have got an accurate examination of what the whole load is like.

### **Michael Hale**

The absolute crucial factor in keeping a lettuce fresh is- is cooling it quickly after harvest. For every hour you delay you lose a day's shelf life. If we're cutting and vacuum cooling on a Monday in the summer season that lettuce will go to Tesco on Monday evening, into their central depot, into the regional distribution centre and from there it will go to store the next day. So it will be on the shelves on Tuesday morning. In the Spanish season, in the imported season, the lettuce takes two and a half days to reach us so on that two to five day scenario you have to have three days really.

We tend to major on the farm in whole head lettuce. By- by whole head I mean a whole lettuce in a bag, whether it's a Romaine or a Little Gem or an Iceberg. The seeds are supplied by several companies in the USA, mainly where we found the best varieties of Iceberg lettuce to

come from and the seeds are propagated by er Madestein which is our plant raiser which is based at Runcton near Chichester and their job is to look after the seed from the moment it goes into the block which we grow from until it is planted in the field and they bring it on for us. So that's really the very start of the supply chain.

### **Christine Cross**

We're not a bureaucratic company in terms of er making people sign up for lifetime contracts, and I don't - I mean this is a very personal view - but I don't actually think you can contract to that because you know if you make people sign up to things and I am sure the lawyers are very adept at getting people out of those sorts of contracts.

It's more about proving your value to each other and that's where the trust in the relationship goes in because undoubtedly at some point in an order life cycle or a cycle of orders you are

going to have that conversation that's says: "we made a mistake, we don't actually want that product. Now - let's have a conversation that says can you find a way out of it? Can we find a way out of it? So let's have a very grown up conversation about this". You are going to have to trust each other.

**Michael Hale**

There is no contract. There is an annual programme which is placed with us which is written. We- we are - the buyer will write to us twice a year and place a winter programme and a summer programme with us, Langmead Farms, based on supply of produce from Langmead Farms in the summer and Langmead Españã in the winter. And that programme is issued based on a competitive cost and maintaining a certain level of technical innovation and proficiency and on our relationship. We don't – there is nothing actually written down to say you will supply this and there is nothing written down by us to say 'you will buy this'. It's very much a trust-based relationship, based on knowledge acquired over the years of supplying Tesco and servicing them. Our relationships with Tesco are very good. We - we have a very close relationship with them. David Langmead began growing lettuce for Tesco in 1987 and fifteen years later we are still doing the job and every year we do more for them, so we must be doing something right.