

Workflow: Picking

Toolkit 4.2

Picking Best Practice

target audience

Farm managers and supervisors.

what it is

Harvesting your fruit is the moment of truth, when all your effort and care reaches a critical point and, in a limited time period, the fruit needs to be picked and transported to the packhouse in the best possible way. This toolkit deals with the most important picking practices.

why it is important

Picking happens quickly, and pickers are incentivised by the bag. However, this must be done very well to ensure that fruit is not injured, whether by sharp stems, rough handling, poor tools, overly full bins and bruising, or a rough and bumpy ride to the packhouse. Furthermore, picking techniques must comply to market requirements, e.g. short, close, squarely cut stems for the export market, snap picking for the juicing market, etc. Even with the best planning, sometimes harvesting will be subjected to “external” events which place further time pressure on the picking process, e.g. unexpected rain, bottlenecks at the packhouse, waiting for that picking team you thought were confirmed. Poor picking practice can have very dire consequences, both to your finances and reputation.

success factors

The critical success factors are:

- **The Season of Consistently Good Production Practice** – All your work of the season comes to bear at harvesting time: the quality of irrigation and fertilising, the pruning and manipulation, the extent to which the trees are of similar shape and size, pest and disease control, orchard maintenance and sanitation, access to fruit on the trees, etc. All these practices have a direct bearing on the process and outcome of your harvest.
- **Training of the Picking Teams** – You may be fortunate to have the same, well-seasoned, and experienced picking teams when you need them. Nonetheless, refresher training is required. However, you may not be that fortunate and will have to work with less experienced or less reliable/stable teams, in which case you will have to put much more effort into induction, training and quality control.

- **Training of the Supervisors and In-orchard Quality Inspection** – Give serious attention to those team leaders who have the biggest impact on where the real work happens. These are your supervisors and employees checking for injuries and doing in-orchard sorting. These employees form a critical part of your quality assurance system. Work closely with them, motivate, control, and provide feedback.
- **Equipment** – Ensure that all the equipment is prepared, serviced, and ready: clean bins and trailers, sharp and sterilised clippers, gloves and other PPE, ladders, undamaged and secure picking bags etc.
- **Health, Safety and Wellbeing** – Perform the health and safety procedures during the induction of picking teams, confirm health & safety procedures, clarify emergency procedures, ensure that first line first aid is in place, and establish those measures that are fundamental to the basic wellbeing of your pickers (ablutions, water points, rest and meal breaks, distance between picking and bins etc.).
- **Clear Instructions and SOPs** – Ensure clear instructions and SOPs. Hold quick and focused shift start up briefings where targets, standards and processes are clarified and repeated. Ideally SOPs should be in writing (simple check lists) and in pictorial form (pictures of the required standard displayed on the side of the trailers/bins).
- **Visual Management, Measurement, and Feedback** – Make full use of appropriate visual management techniques, e.g. simple scoreboards showing progress and providing feedback. Undertake more careful injury testing (indigo test) and provide feedback to the picking teams and supervisors.
- **Short Interval Quality Control** – Perfect your short interval quality control system, i.e. the process your supervisors and in-orchard inspectors should follow.
- **Standard Work and Standard Leader Work** – Standardise all work to ensure good practice. Embed Leader Standard Work through which managers understand and focus on the process (proactive) and not just the outcome (reactive).
- **Time to Packhouse** – Meet the acceptable time threshold between picking and packhouse delivery. On the same day is good, within 2 days is acceptable, but beyond that is poor and most likely unacceptable.
- **Feedback from the Packhouse** – Ensure that you receive feedback from the packhouse, preferably a formal report, stating processing of your delivery, any problems or concerns, and any rejected fruit.

execution steps

See success factors above.

assessment questions

Please Note: There is no minimum / maximum amount of questions you can add

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| 1. | Do you have access to reliable picking teams as and when you need them? |
| 2. | Do you have a formal training and induction programme for the picking teams? |

3.	Do you ensure health, safety, and wellbeing of your picking teams?
4.	Are your supervisors and in-orchard inspectors well trained?
5.	Do you have clear SOPs and WINs (visual instructions) for your picking teams?
6.	Do you have good short interval control measures and a way of communicating the results to your teams?
7.	Have you formalised standard work procedures and leader standard work routines specifically for the picking season?
8.	Do you deliver to the packhouse within an acceptable time period?
9.	Do you receive feedback from the packhouse that enables you to adjust your picking practice immediately or ensure you introduce better measures for the following season?

resources

1.	Citrus Academy AV module – Picking Practices
2.	Citrus Academy production learning material – Harvesting
3.	Citrus Academy skills sheet – Picking export citrus