

SOUTHERN FRESH FOODS (NEW ZEALAND)



2021 SAVE FOOD PACKAGING DESIGN OF THE YEAR - RETAIL
BRONZE WINNER



Southern Fresh Foods Designer Vegetables

Key Outcomes and Measurement



Created new product from restaurant waste



Collectable recipe card to inspire consumers & help reduce meal fatigue



FSC Certified Board + non-toxic inks



Packed in thin film to protect the produce



Recyclable film



Suited for in-home cooking



Vented film for product respiration



Increased shelf life & freshness

Save Food Packaging Guidelines



Extend shelf life/preserve



Valorised food waste into a commercial product



On-Pack recipes



Balance environmental impacts



Product: Designer Fresh vegetables
Company: Southern Fresh Foods
Country: New Zealand

Over 20 years ago, Southern Fresh Foods was established in the heart of the Waikato by the Dunn family, who still own and operate it today. Southern Fresh has gone from its humble beginnings to become one of New Zealand's leading growers and processors of high-quality, specialty baby vegetables, gourmet salads, and fresh herbs.

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ANZ REGIONAL AWARDS PROGRAM



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EXCLUSIVE ENTRY TO



When considering your services and products within the supply chain through to the end consumer, what is your organisation's understanding of food loss & waste?

According to Brock Dunn, Sales & Marketing Manager, Southern Fresh Foods (NZ), "For us, it is about trying to maximise all of the product we grow as we want to sell everything to be consumed. I guess one way of doing that is through the packaging we choose. Such as making breathable packaging and designing the right sort of pack, so the product lasts longer, therefore ensuring that it is actually consumed and not wasted."

Gilad Sadan MAIP, Managing Director, N.A.V.I Co Global adds, "My understanding within the fresh produce space, is that packaging is part of the solution to reduce the global food waste issue. It is interesting to be able to work with brands within fresh produce that understand that there is an issue with food waste across the value chain."

The issue of food waste has been pushed to the front of many consumer's minds since the Pandemic started as they are working and eating more from home now. They have a greater understanding now of how much food is being thrown away during the week. During normal times, you would be happy just to empty the fridge and on Monday order a fresh load of shopping. Now that the wallets have tightened globally, people are paying a lot closer attention to food waste that they generate

at a consumer level. The interesting space that has been created is understanding that packaging aids reducing food waste, and that is really the new pathway to explore.

Explaining that sentiment to the consumers is really the biggest challenge Southern Fresh Foods faces. It is about Southern Fresh Foods developing packaging that meets internal targets and is ultimately efficient from a production standpoint. The packaging does not need to be fancy; but it needs to be efficient to minimise food waste across the value chain, use less plastic where possible and be recyclable.

The world changed with the pandemic. It has changed consumer buying habits, eating habits due to lockdowns and work from home orders and this has forced businesses to adapt. Southern Fresh Foods had to change, adapt, become more flexible and grow alongside how people were viewing the pandemic and how it impacted their consumer behaviour.

They also noticed that there was an increased concern, and rightly so, in food safety from many consumers. Suddenly people became more concerned with their own wellbeing, their health and they did not want to be exposed to anyone with COVID. They have started to demand packaging that adheres to the stringent food safety features; as well as recyclability and sustainability. Southern Fresh Foods had all of these aspects to consider when they started this new product and packaging.



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What prompted your organisation to consider packaging design or redesign that aims to minimise food loss & waste?

The business didn't stop during COVID. There was still product planted in the ground for the next four months, especially with that baby vegetable, that has a growth cycle of anywhere from 16 to 26 weeks. All of sudden, the business had all of this produce being wasted because predominantly, Southern Fresh Foods supplied the restaurants. To reduce the food waste they had to move a food service offering over into the retail space; which works completely differently. The team also needed to develop packaging that incorporated a friendly design and reduce food waste at the same time.

What the team discovered is that they were really approaching a perfect storm in a negative and a positive way. The pandemic and the lockdowns created a huge surplus of product that was restaurant quality ingredients that was destined to the food service and that came to a grinding halt because everything was shut.

The other part of the brief was what the retailers wanted. The retailers were concerned that produce was wilting on the supermarket shelves; especially carrots with the green tops on them. Sadly within 2 to 3 days maximum - even if they are resting on ice - they do not look as vibrant in colour. The team had to look at how the vegetables were wrapped, the perforations and how the packaging aides the shelf life of the product the start.

They were also faced with merchandising and retail challenges that they had not previously been exposed to working in food service. Retailers want to see gourmet produce presented standing upright. The business then needed to incorporate additional features in the pack design to make sure that while it is protected by the bag lasts longer than the normal gourmet carrots and sits upright and presents itself in a very visually engaging way. Working with retailers the team found that they had to focus on food safety, food waste, shelf life and shelf presentation, all wrapped in one pack.

What was the packaging like before the new design?

It was a flow wrap bag with a label on the front. Southern Fresh Foods effectively took that same offering it and placed into a carton of sorts. The idea behind that was the cabin incorporated recipes. It has a plate at the front of the knife and fork either side, so it was about taking the baby vegetables and making them centre of plate.

The goal was for consumers to imagine that the box was a plate and they would be able to look through it and see the gourmet vegetables. This was a creative design that allowed for retail shelf merchandising so that the product stood upright and didn't fall off shelf. It was a big step to be able to redesign the pack so that it offered stronger shelf presence.

The new design was completely from scratch. It enabled Southern Fresh Foods to bundle products together that previously were not bundled together in a way to present as a meal. Some of it was strictly to package products that were packaged there previously on the shelf, and they did not want to sell them loose.

What factors prompted you to enter the PIDA awards?

Navi Co Global have been aware of the PIDA awards for a few years being a part of the packaging and the produce industry. It is their mission to give the fresh produce space the packaging recognition it deserves.

When it comes to the fresh space, the sentiment and the narrative around packaging is very different from other categories. The fresh produce category has limited margins and is always focused on cost savings so this recognition is a great achievement in such a difficult category. Putting an award behind the new product and new packaging gives it a bit more attention and this is great when you are launching a new product into the market.



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When thinking about developing your award-winning packaging, what was the design considerations for minimising food loss & waste and why?

The design was to always take into consideration what the consumer wants. Southern Fresh Foods wanted to place the consumer in the centre of the design.

To reduce food waste in the household consumers need to be inspired to use up the food in their refrigerator. They may not know what to do with the food, or how to use it all as one recipe, so Southern Fresh Foods wanted to help.

Added to that the whole dinner cooking fatigue during lockdowns, working from home and the pandemic makes it a challenge for people to want to cook all the time.

Southern Fresh Foods developed a Chef inspired recipe concept that helps to motivate people to cook meals at home. This adds to the whole value of the product on shelf, as consumers can receive a restaurant quality meal alongside the purchase of the gourmet produce.

Consumers can use the chef inspired recipes and create wonderful meals at home that are value for money. It is about creating a restaurant style meal at home.

Are these considerations implemented in your NPD process every single time?

Southern Fresh Foods aim to work from a consumer, backwards. This is a big influencer in the NPD processes; understanding the key drivers and motivators for consumers. Having a better understanding of creating packaging in products that target specific traits.

Unleash your inner gourmet brand and designer version, designer herbs is another product for Living Herbs. Taking the same fundamental design that was created and then articulating the same concept for different streams.

The living plants example, is very much around food waste, that it still sits on a plug. You can put it in a pot of water, it does not have any soil on it, because it was grown in a hydroponic glass house that Southern Fresh have installed in the last 18 months. You are also able to reseal the top of the bag of it, open and take as much as you need then close it.

This is another concept that was borne out of the pandemic. The new range was developed with consumer mindset and brand attributes with those food waste reduction features.



What do you believe is the most successful outcome/benefit from this design?

When the product range was first launched it took off really well. The campaigns run on social media had really good follow throughput to the on-line store.

The problem the business faced is that they were receiving a lot of first time buyers, but not many repeat purchases.

The work Southern Fresh Foods have done, together with the retailers has been an interesting journey, because they were willing to commit to it and to have their buy in, because the project was developed collaboratively.

There is a lot to be said about being able to create a point of difference with the retailers, explore it, test things that work and things that do not, then being able to pivot and learn from it. Southern Fresh Foods would not have had the same collaborative style opportunity if they had presented the retailers with a me-too pack.

There have been a lot of learnings with this pack and the way it is arranged on the shelves by the produce managers in the stores. Out of the 180 stores, you have 60-70 stores that do a fantastic job of arranging the pack how it is supposed to be displayed. Then sadly there are some stores who jam the packs so tightly on shelf it crushes the pack.

It is about training them not to have as many on the shelf as when they pull the front one out, often what happens is the cardboard gets jammed so the sleeve comes out instead of the cardboard which is not the desired outcome. Then the next one behind it shoves to the front and falls over because it is so tight.

Was the award-winning Save Food Packaging design comparatively more expensive than standard packaging? If so, could you estimate in percentage how much more?

It was no more expensive. Previously, Southern Fresh Foods were having to hand label on the front of every bag, so instead a clear bag was developed with a sleeve that can go straight over the pack.

The new part of the pack that extends the shelf life is a BOPP micro perforated film. There is nothing really expensive but they then took that bag and put it in a self merchandising unit, which is that cardboard sleeve to arrange it on the shelf. The cardboard sleeve did increase the cost of the product. If you are just comparing the bag - which is critical for the extension of shelf life and protection of the product - there was no additional cost. But they would not have been able to arrange it as well, if they did not use the whole cardboard sleeve around it.

As an award winner and a best practice leader, would you recommend/promote to other organisations the Save Food Packaging design benefits? If so, what would these be?

This is the canary in the mines kind of thing. I think this represents what will come in a much bigger way between now and up to 2025, with the UN global sustainability targets and recognition that food waste is just as big of a problem as what other environmental issues are. This project allowed Southern Fresh Foods to showcase how important it is to work together.

The award and recognition are nice and everything that comes with that. It is changing a train of thought to how things need to be done more sustainably moving forward.



As a winner of the PIDA awards, how valuable is the award to your organisation?

“Winning a PIDA is valuable to us because it shows that we are an innovative company and looking for new ideas in which we had the ability to think outside the box and take food service range over into retail,” Brock Dunn, Sales & Marketing Manager, Southern Fresh Foods (NZ).

Gilad Sadan MAIP, Managing Director, N.A.V.I Co Global adds, “The recognition for innovation in the fresh produce category and to be recognised in a category alongside industry leaders gives small produce companies more hope that with a shoestring budget, they can do things just as well as the top end of town are doing.”



The Australasian Packaging Innovation & Design (PIDA) Awards are an Australia and New Zealand program that is coordinated by the Australian Institute of Packaging (AIP). The awards recognise companies and individuals who are making a significant difference in their field across Australia and New Zealand. The PIDA Awards are the exclusive entry point for Australia and New Zealand for the prestigious WorldStar Packaging Awards.

The Design Innovation of the Year company awards recognise organisations that have designed innovative packaging within each of these six manufacturing categories:

- Food
- Beverage
- Health, Beauty & Wellness
- Domestic & Household
- Labelling & Decoration
- Outside of the Box

There are four special awards available:

- Sustainable Packaging Design
- Accessible & Inclusive Packaging Design
- Save Food Packaging Design
- Marketing Award

The **Save Food Packaging Design Special Award** is designed to recognise companies that are working to minimise or prevent food waste from paddock to plate using innovative and intuitive design features that can contain & protect, preserve and extend shelf life; all the while meeting global sustainable packaging targets. This is a WorldStar Packaging Award category.



The Australian Institute of Packaging (AIP) is the peak professional body for packaging education and training in Australasia. The AIP helps shape the careers of generations of packaging professionals – from packaging technologists to international packaging business leaders along with a host of people in associated disciplines – sales and marketing, purchasing, production and environment.

Australian Institute of Packaging

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