

SH PRATT BANANAS FEAT. FIPS – THE FRUIT IMPORT PLANNING SYSTEM

„You can't run a business on Excel sheets“

SH Pratt, one of the leading banana importers and ripeners in Europe, has more than five decades of experience in the business related to the yellow fruit.

For more than two years, the company has been handling the entire import and ripening process through FIPS, activeIT's Fruit Import Planning System.

FIPS supports order planning with live data such as sales volumes and spoilage, all lead times, processes, and ripening cycles – keeps transport planning on track even in the event of serious changes such as the failure of a container – and guarantees demand-oriented ripening planning for on-time deliveries.

So, before the software was implemented, proper planning required filling, reading, and transmitting multiple Excel lists and then manually converting them into orders and shipments in the ERP system. FIPS streamlined the process and minimized the time required.

We spoke with Rob Wells, Head of Business Improvement & Processes at SH Pratt Bananas, about the implementation process, the benefits, and working with FIPS.

IMPLEMENTATION, CROSS-FERTILIZATION, AND EMPLOYEE ADOPTION

For Rob Wells and his team, switching to an intelligent database-driven system meant a major transformation of the operational structure:

"Change is always a challenge. Moving from a familiar system to a new, unfamiliar system - no matter what system it is - will always be difficult. But you can't run a business on Excel sheets. Therefore, it was necessary to take this step. We tried to make the changeover process as smooth as possible."

Accordingly, a lively exchange with activeIT was the order of the day: *"As part of the introduction of FIPS, we held some training sessions over a period of a few weeks and did a video course. In my opinion, it gave us a solid foundation to build on. The implementation process, on the other hand, was a bit more difficult as we were the first big customer for FIPS and there were definitely some development changes we needed to make, which again understandably took time. That development time did make implementation more difficult, but activeIT's support was always there."*

Wells also emphasizes the good relationship with the software company, *"The input from both sides was beneficial. We went through this process together and had the opportunity to tailor the system to how we work. We were able to contribute to the development process and activeIT implemented everything as we needed it."*



SH PRATT BANANAS

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- Since 1947
- Part of the SH Pratt Group
- One of the leading banana importers & ripening plants in Europe
- Distribution of 2,000 pallets per day



Time-consuming planning, the loss of data and sluggish responsiveness were the driving forces behind the project.



Fruit Import Planning System FIPS:

- Quantity planning
- Order planning
- Transport planning
- Stock planning
- Ripening planning
- Transparent supply chain
- Minimization of underdeliveries & spoilage
- Faster response times
- Change history

As the FIPS solution was not yet completed we were able to help shape it – that was and is a clear advantage. There were several feedback rounds, in which we invested a lot of time, but only in this way our industry know-how could flow directly into the development process. This made the implementation harder, but it worked out for the best – now we have a better system to work with."

In terms of employee acceptance of the new system, Rob Wells adds that there were performance issues with FIPS in the beginning: *"That was definitely our biggest concern. Everyone was used to working with Excel. We had one Excel sheet a week, then a new sheet was made, which was done quickly. When we switched to FIPS, there were some views that were not as well optimized as they could be. For example, if you have to wait four or five seconds before you can continue – so the performance was not quite what it should be – of course complaints come. When you are doing the same action frequently, or the prediction and the sequence changes, you have to adjust a lot of things. That's where it makes a big difference if everything works just a bit quicker. That was the main concern from our employees at the beginning. But, as I said, we were the first big FIPS customer, so of course it took a while for performance to improve. Now everyone is familiar with the application – FIPS is a fundamental part of our process now and everyone gets along with it. Even those who are not necessarily IT-savvy and were rather sceptical at the beginning now say that FIPS is great. Especially because of the availability of the information."* (laughs)

"When you look back at the rollout process and compare that to today, it's very amusing. Today, many employees have their eyes on the FIPS screen all day, even though they don't have to. But that shows that the acceptance is there – and much more that they really like FIPS."

MODULES, FEATURES AND WHY VESSEL DELAYS AND ON-TIME DELIVERY ARE NO LONGER MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE

In Rob Wells' company, most of the team is working with the full functionality of activeIT's import and ripening planning tool. In some areas, such as quantity and stock planning, FIPS is not yet fully deployed due to in-house workflows and the amount of functionality available.

Rob Wells comments: *"Digitization and thus the changeover to a new software is not easy for all employees. We still have a transition phase around quantity and stock planning and therefore we use the Excel upload function in FIPS."*

The modules for order, transport, and ripening planning, on the other hand, are used daily in the family business. *"The workflow is very fluid - very natural",* Wells says.

One of the most important functions for the company is formed by the "Vessel Trip" feature in the context of transport planning: *"In the area of procurement, you always have to deal with ship delays. One shipping line has many vessels, and those vessels have many origin ports. We need to work out all the practical combinations and figure out how these things work to match real-world conditions. To ensure that everything complies, we have FIPS. The solution enables us to cope with shipping unreliability. If there is a delay, we can quickly change all of our shipping ETAs, which is then reflected everywhere else in FIPS. Transport planning is an extremely important part of the process around the banana. Therefore, the „Vessel Trip“ function is probably one of the most important functions in FIPS. Although all of them are important!",* says Rob Wells.



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"As soon as an order is received in FIPS, our order planning, our transport planning and our ripening planning are updated. Every hour between the order coming in and when we have to dispatch this product it's quite pressures, because there isn't a lot of time. We have to react as quickly as possible. With FIPS it all is organized in the right place, so we know what actions we need to take very quickly."

Rob Wells
Head of Business Improvement & Processes

CENTRALIZED DATA, UNIFORM USER INTERFACE, FASTER RESPONSES, AND COST SAVINGS

For SH Pratt, it is not only in the area of administration and information gathering that things have changed for the better.

"First of all, FIPS removed a lot of administration work. All the relevant information we need for importing, transporting, and ripening bananas is now stored in one place. It really helps us organize our forecasts, our orders and all the transport. It helps to make sure all these things are planned and, most importantly, that they are linked. It ties everything together very nicely – back to the order, back to the forecast."

At the British company, FIPS also helps all departments work better together: *"If one person at FIPS makes a change, it affects others. So, everyone is very keen to ensure information is up to date and accurate."*

The user-friendly and clear interface, and thus the *"(...) common design language in FIPS"* is also highlighted by Wells. *"We are all familiar with the different views, so it's effortless to find all the information you need. Someone in the imports department finds it easy to interrogate the transport planning, because it looks similar to what they are used to. People can more easily go and find the information themselves, rather than having to ask someone else for it. FIPS makes the information more available to the wider business. Even if you do not have a functional role in one of those departments, the information is accessible."*

The advantage of faster reactions concerning the order is also praised: *"As soon as an order is received in FIPS, order planning, transport planning and ripening planning are updated. We have to react as quickly as possible as there isn't a lot of time between the order coming in and the fruit being despatched. With FIPS it all is organized in the right place, so we know what actions we need to take very quickly."*

Cost centres can also be optimized with FIPS: *"We now have a much better overview of what containers are in which ports and how long these containers have been there. We can now organize the collection of these containers in a way that allows us to control the demurrage costings a lot more. As a result, our control of demurrage has improved significantly. We are less likely to leave a container in the port longer than necessary. It's easier to organize FIFO, because with FIPS we have the great visibility, and all the info is up to date."*

FUTURE PLANS, AND VISIONS

It is not only the quantity planning tool (fipsFORECAST) that is to be used more at SH Pratt in the future. Rob Wells also wants to establish the FIPS stock planning tool in the company.

"This is going to require a little bit of change management, a little bit of gap analysis and of course some more training." (laughs)
"That is a compliment to FIPS. There is so much functionality and that requires training. But once you got used to it, it works very well and does what you need it to do. We are very happy with FIPS - in every respect!"

MORE INFO

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In cooperation with **ADVANTAGE AUSTRIA** (the trade promotion organisation of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber), **Michael Kronheim** from activeIT will be on site in Madrid from **4 - 6 October 2022** as part of **FRUIT ATTRACTION** and looks forward to meeting you in person!

The logo for activeIT, featuring the word "active" in a sans-serif font, "IT" in a larger, bold sans-serif font, and a square icon composed of four smaller squares (two dark blue, two light blue) to the right.

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