



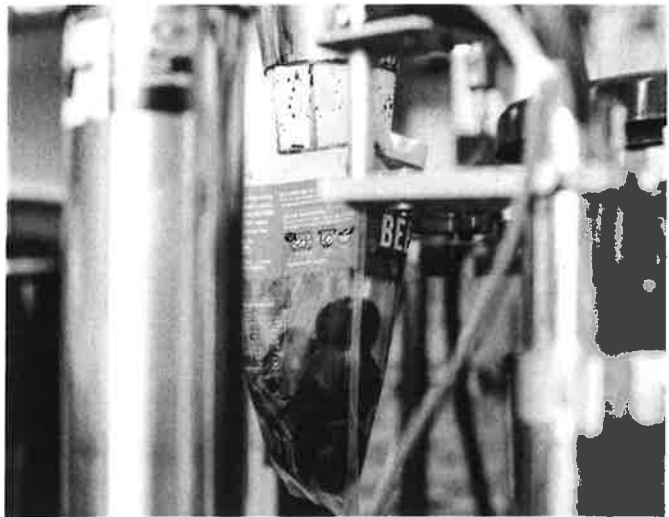
Produce with provenance

LeaderBrand's pouch packed, retorted Pure'n Ezy Baby Beets

Many New Zealanders are familiar with LeaderBrand's Pure'n Ezy Baby Beets and Sweet Corn – those shrink wrapped, ambient, ready to eat vegetables available in the produce department of your local supermarket.

Both products have been pioneered on the back of exhaustive research, decades of tried and tested growing practices and a rigorous, state-of-the-art production process.

Says Richard Burke, CEO at LeaderBrand: "Prior to the introduction of Pure'n Ezy Baby Beets, beetroot was only widely available in loose or canned form. Tapping into the growing consumer demand for beetroot, and having the technology for retorting vegetables in pouches, rather than cans, we decided to explore the potential for processing baby beets in this way.



New markets

The successful product development process has expanded LeaderBrand's range and opened new export markets for beetroot. They are introducing beetroot into South East Asian markets that don't traditionally use the vegetable, with encouraging results. The all-beetroot retail product has great texture and flavour, an 18 month ambient shelf life and offers great convenience to consumers.

The beetroot are grown in North Canterbury – "We get sweeter, firmer beets in that part of the country. These are genuine baby beets, our size specification is 54mm in diameter," says Richard, – and washed, graded and chilled on site, then travel by sea from Lyttleton to Napier in refrigerated containers. The beets remain in the containers for the last leg of their journey by road to LeaderBrands' state-of-the-art pouch pack facility in Gisborne where they are refrigerated until processed.

Once in Gisborne, the beetroot are steamed and peeled, quality checked, graded, weighed and filled into BPA-free retortable pouch packs. The vacuum sealed pouches are then retorted, cooking and preserving the beetroot.

The pouch packs are sourced from Japan and can be recycled by the majority of councils across New Zealand. "We have a high level specification on the pouches," says Richard. "They are made from a multi-layer film. Any tiny pin hole will destroy the product quality and shelf life. So we need perfect pouches every time to ensure product quality."

Communicating provenance

After processing, the beetroot and packaging are quality checked, ensuring the company's stringent quality standards are met, before packing for shipping.

Each pack is coded online with a unique traceability number which allows LeaderBrand to trace individual products back to their origins. Richard is proud of their traceability programme. "We can trace every pack back to seed," he says, "If you can't do that with your products, you are simply not in the game these days. We also have a QR code that is printed on the pack at source to allow consumers to discover the provenance of the beetroot. It links them to our website where there is full information about our process and farms."

About LeaderBrand

Founded in 1975 by Murray McPhail, LeaderBrand is a New Zealand owned and operated fresh produce company. The company prides itself on providing fresh produce of the highest quality sourced from its farms in Canterbury, Gisborne, Matamata and Pukekohe. LeaderBrand harvests approximately 3,500ha of fresh produce each year for domestic and international customers. Products include, amongst others, Pure'n Ezy Baby Beets, broccoli, lettuce, Buttercup Squash, sweet corn, watermelon and a variety of packaged salads which are available from supermarkets countrywide.