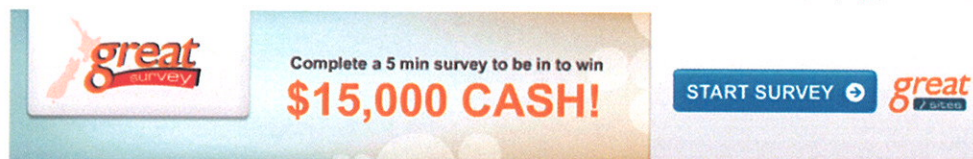



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Muscling in on new orders

Graham Skellem | 19th January 2011

Tauranga-based North Island Mussel Processors (NIMPL) has reached new production levels thanks to its state-of-the-art machinery installed last year.

NIMPL, jointly owned by Sanford, Sealord Group and Greenshell New Zealand, processed over 1.6 million mussels on January 13 alone.

It was a significant industry milestone, said NIMPL general manager Steve Wells.

He said the company had processed and shipped more than 100 million mussels since the start of the season on October 13 - an average of 1.15 million on each of the 86 processing days.

Mr Wells said considerable effort had gone into maximising the new factory and technology since the June opening by Prime Minister John Key.

He said the raw mussels from Coromandel farms were significantly better than last year and helped boost production to over 100 tonnes of green weight on a number of days this year.

NIMPL's owners completed a \$23 million expansion early last year that included a second factory in Glenlyon Ave, Greerton.

The new technology in the factory included automated mussel opening (AMO) machines equipped with knives; a Danish-designed blanching process (rather than cooking) that maximises the weight recovery from the raw mussels; and a gentle-handling conveyor system that separates the mussels before they are weighed and packed.

Lars Knudsen, from Cabinplant in Denmark, visited the NIMPL plant last week and commented that his company did not expect the Tauranga processors to reach full capacity in such a short time.

The heat shocking equipment was adapted from the vegetable industry to green lipped mussel processing - a first for the 40-year-old Danish company.

NIMPL employs 240 staff and has more than doubled its daily output prior to the expansion.

With the present season running until early August, staff have so far processed and packed nearly 7000 tonnes of mussels.



Colourful branding for Pure New Zealand Greenshell Mussels has hit the lucrative Chinese market. Photo / Claire Fraser.

All the product is exported to the US, Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

Mr Wells said about 8000 tonnes of half-shell mussels, worth \$45-\$48 million, will be exported from the new factory this season.

Containers of mussels from NIMPL have already been shipped to the growing Chinese market under the new Pure New Zealand Greenshell Mussel brand.


Pure New Zealand is a joint sales and marketing effort by some of the country's biggest mussel exporters - Sanford, Sealord, Greenshell New Zealand, and Wakatu Incorporation, which has a

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processing plant in Blenheim.

A sales office was opened in Shanghai in July last year and the mussels are sent to the foodservice sector in China, including restaurants. The office has a sales target of 1000-1500 tonnes within 12 months.

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