

Beyond security: managers use surveillance as an innovative farm management tool

Industry employers are using video surveillance to manage their crews, verify food safety compliance and resolve internal disputes.

Each integral sector of the farming industry is expected to comply with their own specified set of regulations. These standards are enforced from various government and industry agencies, particularly as they apply to food safety. Employers are using an innovative approach to substantiate their compliance with these expectations.

Video surveillance capabilities were once considered an exclusive form of security. But with additional regulatory standards these cameras have become a management necessity both on the farm and in packing houses. Farm and operations managers have found the cameras to be effective tools which help to maximize security, verify regulatory compliance and enforce internal operation standards.

Jim Richardson, owner of Surveillance Integration makes a point to find out what his customer expects to achieve by utilizing the equipment. "Our job is to bring to a potential user the willingness to understand what their goal is and then meet that expectation," he said.

Keenan Farms on monitoring plant activity

IP megapixel cameras were first installed at Keenan Farms, a pistachio processing plant in Kettleman City, Calif., in November of 2008. Vice president of operations, Manny Guerrero said they were looking for quality equipment. The cameras they selected provide a lot of detail and capture key points of interest.

For Guerrero, this is the biggest advantage of surveillance capabilities. "I'm able to monitor plant activity in key spots," he said. This is even more critical in season, when their staff can potentially double. Guerrero explained that there's a cost benefit to the system which has helped monitor questionable behavior during peak times.

Since employees are aware of the cameras, Guerrero says that they are a deterrent to some people. He has heard second-hand that people talk and he incorporates this knowledge into his management style. "I'll provide feedback so they know the system is being utilized," he said.

In the event of a conflict, the cameras are accessed to review the case in question. Guerrero pulls up the video to verify whether or not there's truth to an allegation by evaluating the activities, and taking note of what really happened.

Guerrero can also access details which help to investigate supposed injuries and potential theft. In the past, they have suspected and disproven such instances. "But we could prove it if we have to," he confidently stated.

Cecelia Packing on real-time visibility

David Roth, President at Cecelia Packing in Orange Cove, Calif., described a number of questionable scenarios that have been recorded at their facility.

The operation consists of a 2000-acre farm and a packing plant which processes in excess of 1.2 million cartons of citrus varieties. Between them, there are 27 cameras strategically placed in what Roth calls "high susceptible"

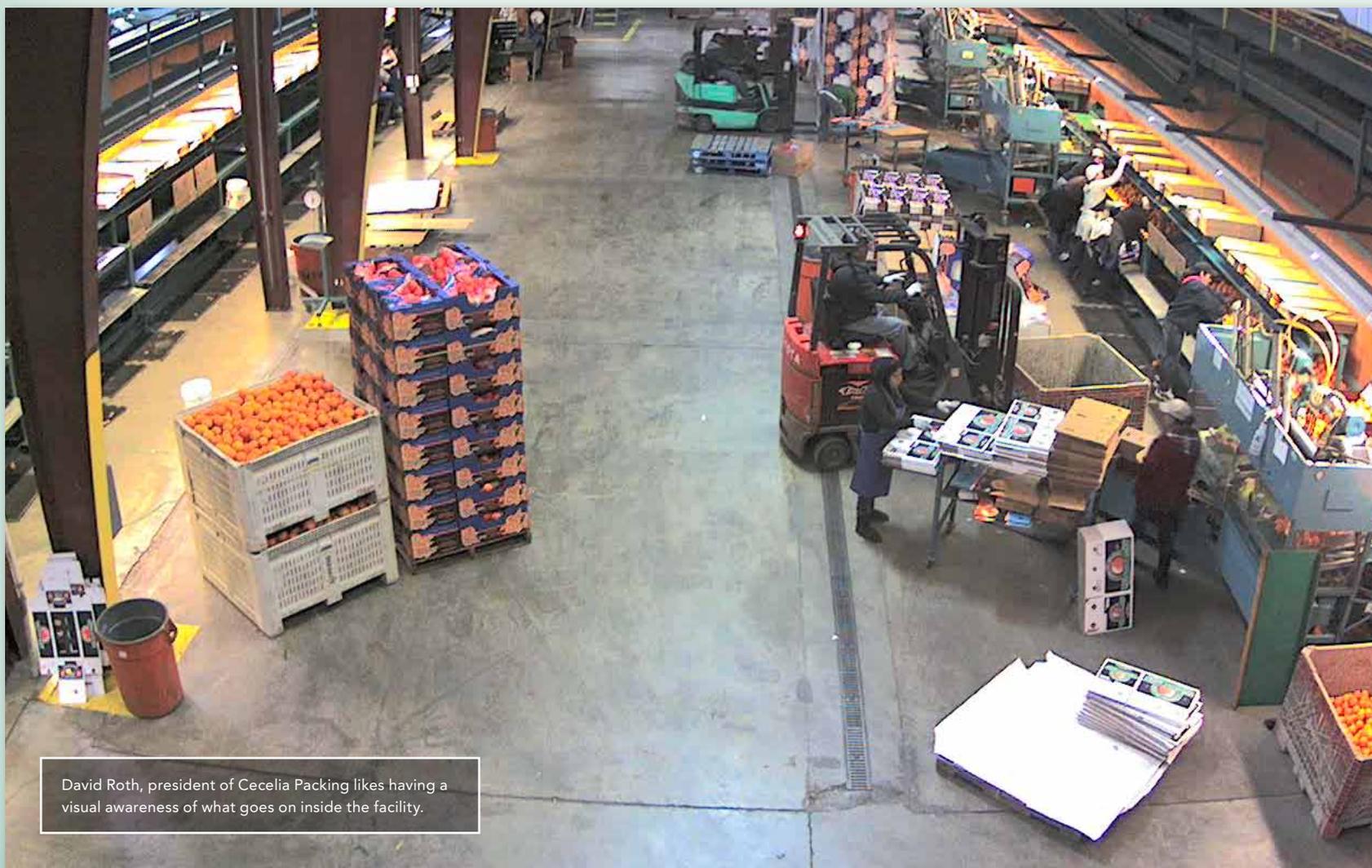
areas. He can access footage from these sites from his office as well his home computer, via the internet.

In the last 10 years, the cameras have captured someone running from the police, an employee stealing gas and a case of spontaneous combustion. The cameras helped rule suspected arson out of the question when a tractor erupted into flames.

Roth burned the footage onto a disc and turned it in to the insurance agency commenting on the ease of the process. "It was the cleanest deal we've had in a \$60,000 claim," he said.

When the analog system was first installed, Roth was primarily interested in a security device, but also foresaw its potential to authenticate food safety compliance. Today, he believes that more and more people will be using surveillance as an asset for food safety. "It gives me knowledge of what's really happening around the facility," he said. "I just have a visual awareness of what all is going on."

The system enables Roth to man-



David Roth, president of Cecelia Packing likes having a visual awareness of what goes on inside the facility.



Surveillance on a production line at Kennan Farms provides vice president of operations, Manny Guerrero the ability to monitor questionable behavior during peak times.

age the production mode and simultaneously track any problems. He watches for things such as broken equipment and unproductive employees. “It’s a good feeling to see everything that’s happening 300 yards away,” he said.

Over time, Cecelia Packing has converted to an almost entirely IP network digital system. Older analog cameras have been replaced with newer, more capable digital equipment as needed. Roth said the new technology provides a “clean, clear and crisp” image that can be seen at long distances. He can refocus and even blow up part of the screen without losing the image quality. However, Roth notes that the analog cameras still serve their purpose for close-ups of subjects such as time clocks.

Even with these advances in technology, Richardson pointed out that there is no price difference. “One camera provides the detail of five to seven cameras at the same cost,” he said, noting additional savings on installation.

Kool Kountry on camera capability

Kool Kountry, LLC, is a commercial cold storage facility with a 50,000 square-foot warehouse in Reedley, Calif. Managing member, Ralph Hackett, explained that 26 IP cameras were installed at the warehouse three years ago to enhance security at the rural operation.

But Hackett has observed a number of additional benefits. “Safety, security and accountability are all enhanced with a proper system,” he said. Advanced IP megapixel cameras are set to record the loading and unloading of every truck. They can count pallets and boxes and record license plates of the trucks hauling them. “This feature has settled several misunderstandings with carriers which has avoided protracted discussions,” Hackett explained.

Remote access to the footage is a convenience Hackett and other Kool Kountry managers also take advantage of. “Owners and managers have access to multiple locations from our

home and laptops,” which are used to discuss employee safety and resolve disputes.

The biggest advantage of surveillance, according to Hackett, is that the “cameras make for a safer work environment and help us verify food safety compliance,” he said. “In addition, they are an excellent deterrent to crime and theft,” he continued.

“We are always looking to improve our processes, particularly in the food safety arena.” At Kool Kountry, the existing state-of-the-art surveillance equipment enables management to observe these practices in every facet of their operation, from receiving, through packing and shipping.

On the cutting-edge

The future of surveillance systems offers many more promising management components for the agricultural industry. The current trend integrates video with Physical Access Control and “analytics”. Richardson says these applications, which manage data, will further help employers to improve

their staffs’ productivity, without an intrusive management style.

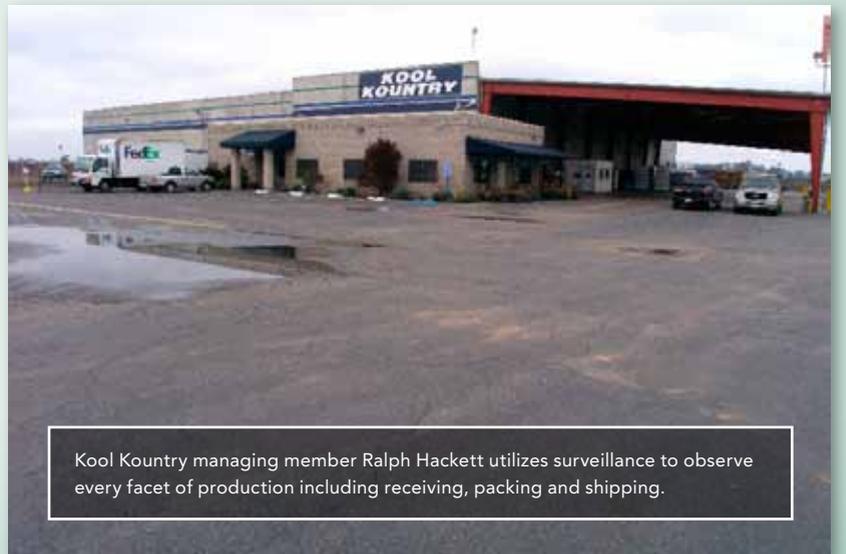
Video analytics will allow users to manage their own settings and set the system to automatically detect abnormal behaviors, unique to their facility. Users will be able to develop their own parameters to trigger these abnormal behaviors. The system is designed to recognize features such as depth, speed, size and direction of travel. These settings will help to eliminate unnecessary alarm signals, for activity outside the designated parameters.

In addition, an app is available which will provide access to the surveillance system from any remote site using a portable device (i.e. iPhone, Android Phone, or iPad). Roth expressed plans to utilize this tool on his iPad.

Richardson expressed the dedication of Surveillance Integration to being on the cutting-edge of these technologies and providing a tool which enables management to do their jobs more effectively. ■



Hackett values the ability of the cameras to count pallets, boxes and record license plates of trucks entering and leaving.



Kool Kountry managing member Ralph Hackett utilizes surveillance to observe every facet of production including receiving, packing and shipping.