

Upgrade Project for Drag Chain and Feed Bunk Scanner – Perspective and Experience of a Samoan Seasonal Worker in Australia

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INTRODUCTION: MY BACKGROUND AND THE AUSTRALIAN COUNTRY CHOICE COMPANY

Like most seasonal workers from the Pacific Islands, I too sought out opportunities to better support my family and personal growth. Having departed Samoa in 2022, where I previously worked as a Customs Officer for the Ministry of Customs and Revenue for eight years, I was assigned to join the Australian Country Choice Company. The Australian Country Choice Company is a well-established family-run meat processing company that has been a key player in the Australian agricultural industry for several decades. Founded in 1971, the company has since evolved into a highly reputable organisation known for its commitment to quality and sustainability (Australian Country Choice, 2024). Specializing in beef production, Australian Country Choice Company operates with a strong emphasis on ethical practices, ensuring that its products meet the highest standards in animal welfare and environmental stewardship.

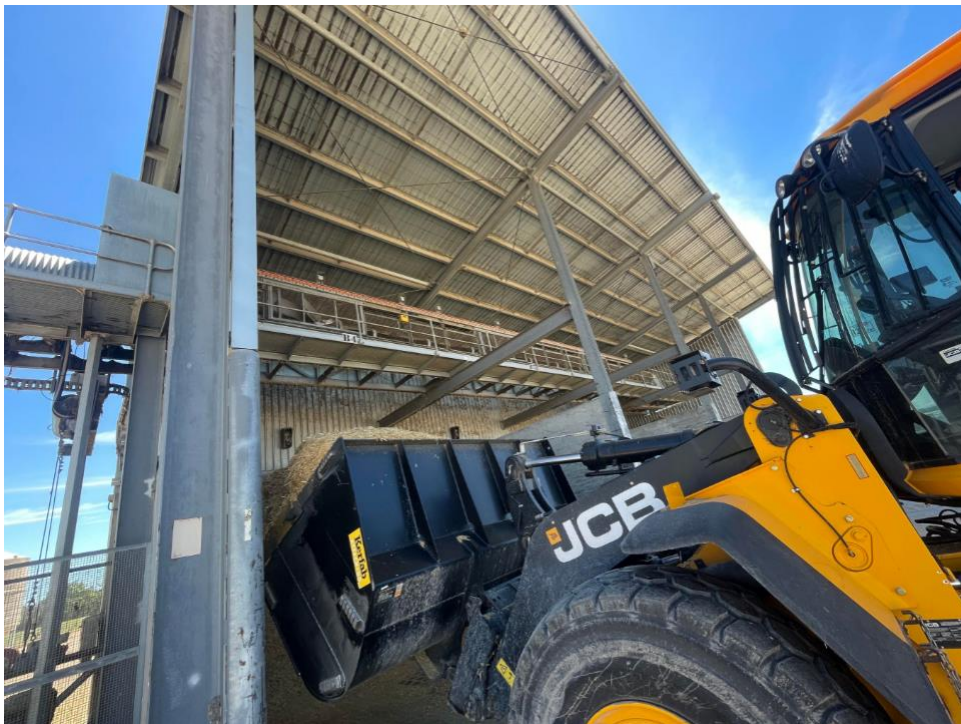


Figure 1: Shed Front Load Operation

With a focus on innovation and efficiency, the company has continued to grow and adapt to changing market demands while maintaining a strong sense of tradition and integrity. Part of their formula for success is the recruitment of seasonal workers to enable the company to meet the labour shortages. When I came on board, I was first assigned the role of a Feed Truck Driver. Prior to taking up this role, I had never driven a truck, nor did I know how to drive a manual transmission vehicle. However, I was able to quickly learn and perform in the role for

a good three-month period. I was promoted to the role of Shed Front Load Operator, where I was responsible for the mixing of feeds. After one month in that responsibility, I was trained for six months as an Allocator, where I was given another promotion to Assistant Mill Manager, which is what I still do as of the date of this journal article. In my current capacity, I have had the privilege to see first-hand upgrade project works carried out by the Australian Country Choice which I have elaborated on in the following chapters.

UPGRADE OF THE DRAG CHAIN TO THE CONVEYOR BELT

When I joined the company, the existing system they used was a drag chain. According to Facet Engineering (2023), the drag chain functions as a conveyor that transports the ready-mixed feeds from the mixing boxes in the shed to their designated bunkers. The upgrade sees the company removing the chains and replacing them with a belt which has made the operation lighter, faster, and less prone to damage when carrying the weight of the feeds. This is also in addition to reducing noise hazards caused by the chains. Below is the image of the conveyor system:



Figure 2: Conveyor System Replacement of Chain with Belt

In my opinion, the Australian Country Choice Company's verdict to upgrade from a drag chain to a conveyor belt system is a strategic decision likely aimed at enhancing efficiency and productivity within the operations. By making this transition, the company is investing in advanced technology that facilitates smoother material handling and product transportation. The use of conveyor belts allows for the continuous and automated movement of goods, reducing manual labour and streamlining production processes. This upgrade signifies the company's commitment to modernizing its operations, increasing output capacity, and maintaining high-quality standards (Craig, 2022 & Berry, 2019). The Australian Country Choice Company's transition to conveyor belts demonstrates forward-thinking practices and a dedication to staying competitive in the market by adopting innovative solutions for improved operational performance (Sate of Conveying Report, 2023). The upgrade made feeding daily more efficient and its delivery a lot more immediate. I think the challenges were more

frequent when the drag chain was still in operation because it tended to break easily under the pressure of the heavy loads it carried.



Figure 3: Inside the Conveyor Belt System

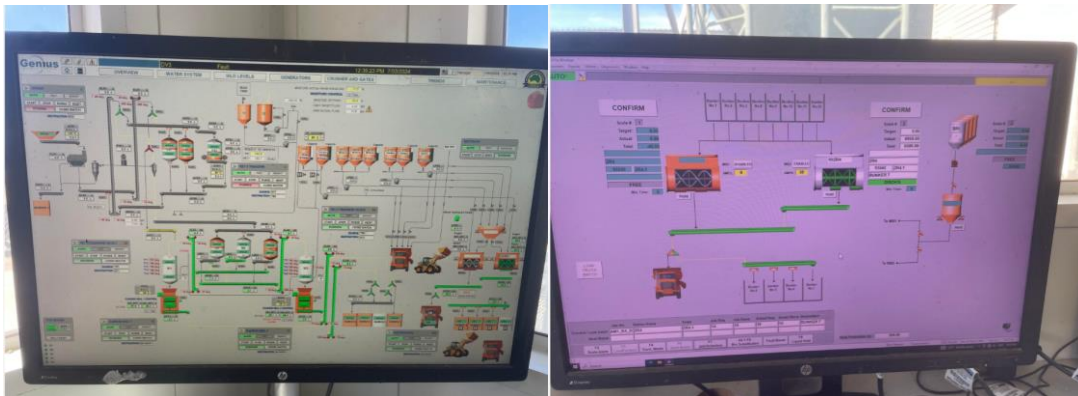


Figure 4: Conveyor System Readings

UPGRADE OF ALLOCATION UTE WITH FEED BUNK SCANNER

The second project I was able to observe was the implementation of a cutting-edge upgrade for their allocation ute by integrating a state-of-the-art feed bunk scanner. This advanced technology allows for precise monitoring and allocation of feed for livestock, enhancing efficiency and accuracy in the feeding process (Greter et al, 2013 & McMeniman, 2018). By utilizing this scanner, the company ensures optimal nutrition for their animals while also streamlining their operations (Chen et al, 2019). The effectiveness of this upgrade and this practice has been supported by overwhelming increasing research literature. Witnessing this upgrade reflects Australian Country Choice Company's commitment to staying at the forefront

of innovation in the agriculture industry, demonstrating their dedication to excellence and maintaining high standards in their operations. Before the scanner, assigned Allocators like myself used to physically look and make their decisions for feeds required daily for the cattle which is not very accurate. This can at times lead to cattle not consuming enough feeds or less which affects their daily intake consequently leading to them not reaching their target weight to have them exported back to the separate company that owns them. The upgrade of the scanner creates consistency and removes the human error risk and component of the work.



Figure 5: Parked Allocation Utes



Figure 6: Allocation Ute with Bunk Scanner



Figure 7: Allocation Scanner Mounted on Allocation Ute



Figure 8: Inside Ute - Scanner Reader Screen

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: OPPORTUNITIES IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Moving forward from the upgrade projects, I would also like to briefly touch on my thoughts on the potential opportunities in the South Pacific, based on my observation. Opportunities for seasonal workers from Samoa are abundant, particularly through programs linked to the Australian Country Choice Company. This company offers temporary work opportunities in various sectors, providing individuals from Samoa and neighboring islands the chance to gain valuable skills and experience in the Australian workforce. As highlighted by Gibson (2021) report published by the Asian Development Bank, these programs not only benefit the workers by allowing them to earn a living and support their families back home but also help in meeting the labour demands of Australian industries during peak seasons. More

importantly, these opportunities give individuals like myself the chance to learn new skills and enhance the practice of lifelong learning. The benefits and prospects have also been supported by Doan (2023), in a World Bank published paper. From being on the inside, I have witnessed that the Australian Country Choice Company prides itself on fostering a supportive and safe work environment for its seasonal workers, ensuring they receive fair wages and adequate training throughout their employment. By participating in these programs firsthand, I have benefitted from the opportunity to broaden my horizon, build lasting relationships, and contribute to both the Australian and Samoan economies in an individualistic but very meaningful way.

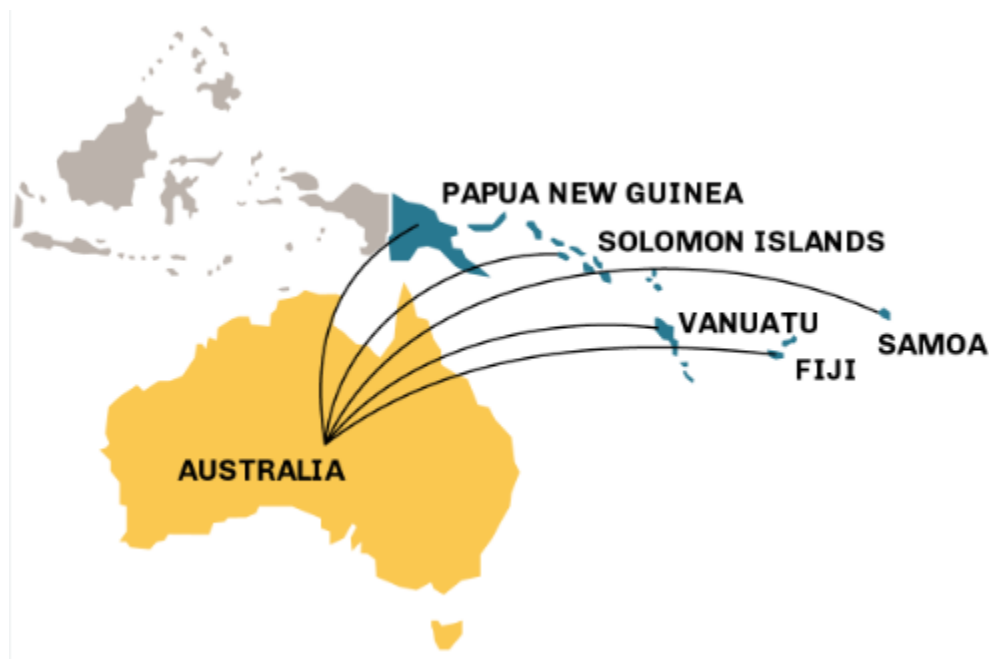


Figure 9: Australia Seasonal Worker Network Map

This leaves me wondering with excitement that the potential for expansion to Samoa and the Pacific is a promising opportunity for the Australian Country Choice Company. With its expertise in sustainable agriculture practices and commitment to high-quality meat production, the company is well-equipped to meet the growing demand for premium meat products in these regions. By potentially expanding its operations perhaps proportionally to Samoa and the Pacific, the Australian Country Choice Company and other similar firms can not only create new business opportunities but also contribute to the local economies by providing employment and fostering agricultural development. This potential strategic move aligns with the company's mission of promoting economic growth and sustainability while maintaining its reputation as a leading player in the global meat industry. With a focus on innovation and collaboration, I truly believe that Australian Country Choice Company is poised to leverage its strengths and resources to successfully expand into Samoa and the Pacific, bringing value to both the company and the communities it serves. However, like all business opportunities, such a move will need a detailed feasibility study.

CONCLUSION: SUMMING UP MY LEARNINGS AND INSIGHTS

In conclusion, the Australian Country Choice Company's decision to upgrade from drag chain to conveyor belt brought forth valuable insights and experience for me. One key insight gained was the importance of considering long-term efficiency over short-term costs. Despite the initial investment required for the conveyor belt system, I witnessed a notable increase in productivity and a significant reduction in maintenance costs in a short period of time. This upgrade served as a reminder to me of the need to adapt to modern technologies to stay competitive in the industry, regardless of which one. Additionally, the transition highlighted the significance of thorough planning and execution when implementing new systems to minimize disruptions to production schedules. By meticulously evaluating the benefits and potential challenges of the upgrade, I believe that the Australian Country Choice Company showcased a commitment to innovation and continuous improvement that ultimately led to enhanced operational effectiveness and overall success.

My second key insight gained was the importance of thorough planning and testing before implementing new technologies in operational workflows. This is what I picked up during the upgrade of the allocation Ute with bunk feed scanners. The process not only ensures a smooth transition but also minimizes potential disruptions to everyday tasks. Additionally, the project highlighted the significance of effective communication among team members and stakeholders. Clear and consistent communication helped to address challenges promptly and foster collaboration throughout the upgrade process. Furthermore, analyzing and understanding user feedback and experience likely played a crucial role in fine-tuning the technology to better suit the specific needs of the company. By incorporating user perspectives into the upgrade, the Australian Country Choice Company was able to enhance efficiency and productivity within their operations. Overall, both upgrade projects emphasized the significance of meticulous planning, open communication, and user-centric design in successful technology upgrades within the agricultural industry. My experience in witnessing this firsthand, also opened up the thought of potential future expansion and collaboration with the Pacific Islands.

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