Anybody can innovate

It is an often quoted story that Einstein once said to a beautiful model “what if we could have a child with your looks and my brains”, to which she is reported to have replied “yes, but imagine if the child had your looks and my brains”. There is quite a buzz in the industry with respect to innovation at the moment, ignited by the Post Harvest Innovation Fund (PHI) and its work to date. The term innovation means a new way of doing something. It may refer to incremental, radical, and revolutionary changes in thinking, products, processes, or organizations. A distinction is typically made between invention, an idea made manifest, and innovation, ideas applied successfully. (Wikipedia). So you do not have to be an ugly scientist with unmanageable hair to be an innovator. Anybody in any business can innovate – the personal assistant may find a new way of organising weekly schedules, a secretary may find a better way to arrange the office, or a packhouse manager may develop new equipment to improve on delivery. Innovative people are always looking at doing things differently. As a fruit industry many of the things we do and the way we do them are tied up with the past, when the industry operated through a single channel system and all activities were centralised. A lot of the systems in place are still based on these single channel arrangements. There must be huge opportunities to change the way we do things, which would increase efficiency and reduce costs. But how many companies in the industry are encouraging innovation from their employees – would it not be an idea to set some budget aside every month, and use this to reward the employee who comes forward with innovative ideas?

Recently PHI held a meeting to cover some of the work being done following the Commonwealth report on logistics and the cold chain. Two things were pretty evident from this meeting – firstly, we have people in this industry who are passionate about what they do and how they do it, and secondly we have a lot of work to do to cover all the possibilities that were identified that could improve our competitiveness. Any journey begins with that first step, in many cases the first steps have been taken and it is now up to us to fall in line, or get to the front of the line, to make it happen.