



**The Fresh Produce ERP Buyer's Guide**

# **Finding the Right Solution for Your Business's Needs**







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# Why You Need an ERP

Between tough competition, changing consumer demands and increasing costs for raw materials, utilities and logistics, fresh produce businesses face significant challenges. Nowadays, delivering high quality fruits and vegetables to your customers isn't the only requirement for success.

It's also critical to streamline, simplify and automate business procedures, from receiving raw materials to delivering products to customers. After all, efficient operations are a key differentiator for the best-performing players in the fresh produce industry. This is where a state-of-the-art enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution comes in.

The right ERP software will make an immediate positive impact, providing specialized tools for the fresh produce industry, facilitating your processes and promoting visibility of vital information. By choosing and deploying a top-tier system, you can streamline your entire supply chain into one seamless workflow, boosting profitability and customer satisfaction.

Stay ahead of market demands and changes by taking full advantage of what the right technology solutions have to offer. Invest the necessary time and energy into researching your options so that you can move forward with confidence. Make your organization's digital transformation a strategic move, not a leap of faith.



# Key Signs It's Time for a New ERP Solution

Does your current technology stack empower your fresh produce business, or is it holding it back? You can't afford to leave the potential rewards of implementing a modern ERP solution on the table.

That said, how do you know when it's time to make a change? Ask yourself these questions:

If You Don't Have an ERP	If You Have an Existing ERP
Do you use spreadsheets to compensate for lack of purpose-built software?	Do you have the same data or functionality replicated in multiple systems?
Do your teams operate in data silos, with little visibility into each others' activities and updates?	Does your system need more and more workarounds and tweaking each year?
Is your business struggling to scale, acquire new companies or enter new markets?	Is your current system up to date with compliance features for the latest regulations?
Are your employees often tied up in time-consuming manual tasks?	Has your current system been widely adopted by your staff, or are there only a few users?

Depending on how you've answered, you may feel a sense of urgency to shore up your digital foundation and equip your company with a new ERP as soon as possible. It's crucial to conduct due diligence before purchasing one, though—educating yourself on the available options and how they fit with your business is necessary to ensure you choose wisely.

Luckily, you've already taken the first step by reading this guide. Continue to learn more about the most important factors to consider in your evaluations.







# 10 Must-Haves for Your Next ERP

When you first begin your search for the right fresh produce ERP, you'll quickly realize there are plenty of solutions for sale, and you'll have a lot of information to digest. You can simplify the process if you know the key differentiating factors to look for—so we've pulled together this list for you to keep in mind.

## 1. Fresh Produce Industry-Specific Functionalities

Do you want to start from scratch, build on top of your current system or get started with a solution that is optimized and adapted to your industry? Reinventing the wheel or heavily customizing a system might not be a good idea when selecting your future ERP solution.

### Choose Vertically Tailored Software

When looking for a new ERP solution, you basically have three options: Build your own from scratch, customize a standard ERP solution to your needs, or choose an industry-specific ERP solution developed, optimized and adapted to meet the specific needs of fresh produce companies.

Selecting a solution that was developed for fresh produce businesses should generally allow you to start reaping a return more quickly. A purpose-built ERP will offer the features and configuration to match your highly specialized processes (like quality management, grade-out/pack-out pricing, consignments and grower certifications) while still meeting your needs in terms of finance, sales, production and distribution tools.

### Best Practices Included

Another benefit of an industry-specific ERP solution is that it has been developed by a vendor with deep insight into your industry and experience from a multitude of similar projects. This ensures that you get the best guidance and reduces your risk.

ERP solutions from providers that know the fresh produce sector are built on industry best practices. This means that the software is built to support proven, optimal ways of performing your critical processes, which can lead to significant improvements in effectiveness and competitiveness.





## **2. Affordable Total Cost of Ownership (TCO)**

Investing in a new ERP solution is a significant investment. But to determine just how costly it will be, you need to calculate the total cost of ownership (TCO), which includes not just the cost of purchasing (or subscribing to) the ERP, but also the expenses you'll incur over time as you use the software, like those for implementation, licensing, configuration, maintenance, training and more.

### **Be Wary of Additional Hidden Costs**

It's important to keep in mind that beyond the aforementioned, there may be additional "hidden" costs that inflate the TCO of an ERP system and result in other negative consequences. For example, if you can't afford to maintain a solution, you may be forced to skip upgrades and thus suffer with sub-par performance or antiquated design.

Customizations implemented for specialized fresh produce processes can also necessitate additional expenses, effort and time. Or, if the time needed to train employees on the new system is not included, initial returns may fall short of expectations.

### **Using TCO as a Tiebreaker**

When two solutions provide roughly equivalent benefits over a defined period of time, a TCO comparison can help you decide between them. That said, don't let the number dictate your decision—you should also consider how well each of the providers' company culture aligns with your own to ensure a harmonious relationship.



### 3. Long-Term Provider Commitment

Do you want to start from scratch, build on top of your current system or get started with a solution that is optimized and adapted to your industry? Reinventing the wheel or heavily customizing a system might not be a good idea when selecting your future ERP solution.

#### Avoid the Risks of Outdated and Unsupported Systems

When you buy an ERP system, you are not purchasing a fixed, static product. You are establishing a continuous relationship with the vendor based on the trust that they'll continue to keep the software updated and supported for many years to come.

Be aware of the fact that, with enterprise technology constantly evolving, older software can drop down on the provider's list of priorities and hence become a liability for the user—you. Vendors sometimes shift strategy or get acquired, and that can lead to a product's roadmap being truncated, leaving you with no more upgrades, enhancements or new functionality going forward.

#### Seek Out a Long-Term Technology Partner

You should look for a provider with a strategic, long-term focus on continuous research and product development. Go for a solution from a vendor with a strong track record of delivering new and compelling functionality for your platform—especially as it relates to regulatory compliance, as that is bound to evolve over time.

Don't put your business at risk by choosing a platform from a company with high volatility and an uncertain future. Find a technology partner you can trust and rely on to continuously improve their offering.







## 4. Fast, Efficient Implementation

Replacing your old ERP system can be a daunting task. But it doesn't have to be a long, tedious process—by choosing the right solution backed by an industry-recognized provider, your transition can be smooth and seamless.

### It Doesn't Have To Be Lengthy

The risk of a drawn-out and complex implementation project could hold your fresh produce organization back from getting the ERP it needs in place. While it's true the deployment of a new solution can bring about major change, it does not necessarily require extensive time and effort on your team's part if proper planning is conducted and your vendor has solid experience.

### Inquire About the Average Duration of Implementation

ERP deployments that drag on not only delay realization of benefits but also result in greater costs. Ask the providers of each of the solutions that you're considering what their average implementation time is and whether or not they foresee any nuances in your situation that could require additional time.

## 5. Adaptability and Scalability

Change is inevitable and happens fast, especially in the consumer-driven fresh produce sector. It's therefore likely that your needs today are different from the ones you'll have in six months, so your solution needs to be flexible in order to accommodate.

### Flexibility for Your Workflows

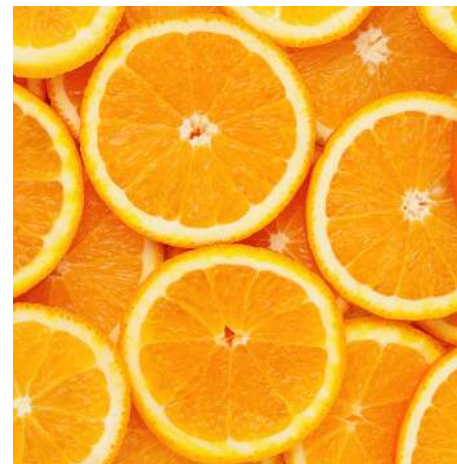
If your software is inflexible and fixed in how it functions, there will soon be a disparity between the way it was originally implemented and the new requirements of your business. You may reach the point where the processes of the system actually constrict the ability of your users to efficiently run your business.

Modern fresh produce ERPs allow you to tailor your processes based on your organization's unique workflows and can even automate some steps when you need to free your staff from routine tasks. This makes it easier for you to ensure that the system works for your specific circumstances.

### Scaling Up When the Time Is Right

When selecting a new ERP solution, you need to consider an expansion scenario—after all, growth is likely among your top business goals. Consider what you need from your ERP in the short-term and what you might need from it down the road, and make sure that the solution that you are considering supports both plans.

Depending on the situation, you may need to scale your system from a single-instance implementation to a multi-instance implementation or a hub-and-spoke implementation. You may also need to add users as you hire more staff, or potentially leverage the distribution management capabilities of your ERP. Make sure that whatever software you choose allows for those changes.







## **6. Configurability and Modularity**

How can you accelerate the realization of the benefits your fresh produce ERP promises? You need to be able to prioritize the specific functionalities that can address your company's pain points.

### **Select a System Born Modular**

Modularity—also called composability, meaning that functions of the system can be added, swapped and removed in any order, at any time—allows you to deploy and begin using specific features to support individual processes when and how you see fit. That way, you can start small or start big according to your needs, not a predetermined setup.

### **Cohesion Is Crucial**

Individual modules available for a solution might have been written at different times by different programmers, so they could look and feel quite different. The bigger problem is when related modules aren't integrated and thus require duplication of data entry and updates.

When examining the tools that an ERP offers for a specific functional area, make sure that they are intrinsically linked to one another, sharing the same data and remaining synced at all times. That will help eliminate discrepancies and save your staff time on redundant busy work.



## 7. Optimized Mobile Experience

Today's on-the-go workers need to be able to log on from their phone for remote work and the latest updates. Mobile devices have become an important extension of fresh produce ERPs thanks to two distinct benefits that support workforce productivity.

### Flexible Access

The first benefit of mobile-accessible ERPs is connecting employees, partners and even customers to the system whenever and wherever they need it. Real-time visibility into inventory and orders helps them make sound decisions on the fly, and being able to log in with just a browser and credentials makes collaborating simple.

### Ease of Use

The second benefit is mobile devices' enhanced user interface, portability, highscreen resolution and finger-swipe functionality, all of which make completing tasks a breeze. While it is unlikely mobile ERP applications will altogether replace traditional desktop ERP applications in the near future due to some inherent limitations, they help meet the need for agility in today's fast-paced business environment.





## 8. High-Level Data Visibility

Data represents value in the business world. Through analysis, it can provide insight and a competitive advantage. Empower your decision-making with real-time insights from dashboards, reports and analysis that bring you up to speed at a glance.

### Convenient, Legible Formats

Most fresh produce businesses today have more data than they know what to do with. And getting to that data and then presenting it in a useful manner for a convincing analysis are two tasks that many organizations find difficult.

Modern ERP solutions help you pull data and create reports at the click of a button. They also help you monitor performance with dashboards that update in real time and reflect your company's most important metrics.

### Business Intelligence (BI)

To make the most of your data and inform your best decisions, you should go for an ERP platform that integrates smoothly with business intelligence (BI) tools. These solutions, powered by machine learning, can calculate accurate projections based on past data and report on key performance indicators (KPIs) that are critical for your success.



## 9. Cloud Deployment Options

If you are considering a new ERP solution for your fresh produce business, one of the most important decisions you will need to make is whether to implement your solution locally or deploy it from the cloud. Let's discuss the differences and why the latter is generally preferable.

### On-Premises vs. Cloud

The basic difference between an on-premises ERP and cloud ERP is straightforward. On-premises ERP solutions are installed on your company's hardware at your facility and maintained by your IT staff, while cloud ERPs are provided as a service that you subscribe to (known as the Software as a Service, or SaaS model) and managed by your provider.

### The Advantages of Cloud ERPs

The deployment model you choose can have a considerable impact across your business. There are several significant benefits to be unlocked with a cloud implementation, including:

- › Little to no hardware requirements
- › Vendor-side maintenance
- › Streamlined installation
- › Enhanced cybersecurity
- › Broader accessibility

With these advantages potentially creating a competitive advantage for your organization, it's best if you can at least select a technology provider that offers cloud deployments, even if you choose to stay on-prem for now. The system can always be migrated later (though it is ideal to implement from the cloud from the start).





## Tailored Functionalities for Growers, Packers and Shippers

At Apteau, we know that the fresh produce segment is made up of many different kinds of businesses conducting their own specialized processes at distinct stages of the supply chain. Whether your business specializes in growing, packing, shipping, wholesaling, a combination of these activities or something else entirely, you have unique needs when it comes to ERP system functionality.

That's why we developed Apteau Fresh Produce ERP with purpose-built features for the challenges you face, including:

- › **Traceability:** Lot and subplot management tools give you visibility down to the item level while also keeping you prepared for recalls.
- › **Quality Control:** Establish the parameters of your quality control processes to ensure they're always completed and monitor status updates in real-time.
- › **Grower Returns Management:** Return and settlement tracking capabilities facilitate implementation of accounting methods, fee structures and pricing strategies.
- › **Over & Under Delivery:** Resolve discrepancies easily by automatically adjusting the order total accordingly.
- › **SKU Management:** An advanced attributes module allows you to establish any number of item details without creating new SKUs.
- › **Trade Management:** Work with trade plans to track accruals and costs associated with commission, rebates, freight and more.
- › **Weighbridge:** Record inbound and outbound truck weights to help streamline the receiving and dispatch of raw agricultural commodities.
- › **Expiration Management:** Effectively manage expiration dates, maintain quality standards and make data-driven decisions to optimize inventory usage.

There's even more to love about our fresh produce ERP, so be sure to [\*\*read more\*\*](#) about the features that make it ideal for your business.

## 10. Positive Customer References

There may be no better indicator of an ERP's quality than the testimony of a happy existing customer. You'll want to request, review and vet several references from any provider you're considering.

### Time for the Litmus Test

Once you've narrowed down the options to a short list of fresh produce ERPs that could fit your particular needs and goals, it is time for the ultimate litmus test: customer references. You want to be sure that the provider of the solution has completed implementation projects that have successfully solved the challenges of other companies similar to yours.

The only way to find this out is by speaking with existing clients. Talk to at least three references and ask them what went right, what went wrong and what they might have done differently. If a vendor cannot provide at least three strong testimonials, they may not have the experience you need.

### Industry Recognition Is a Big Bonus

While not quite as crucial as good customer references, industry recognition and awards are also proof points worth considering. Just be sure to research what specifically the vendor was recognized for and how recently it happened—an award for a different product, or one given five years ago, is far less significant than a recognition received recently for the fresh produce solution you're considering.

# Aptean Fresh Produce ERP: The Next Generation of Produce Pro Software

In a rapidly evolving industry, staying ahead requires innovation, adaptability and a commitment to excellence. The evolution of Produce Pro Software into Aptean Fresh Produce ERP has resulted in a solution ideal for fresh businesses seeking to thrive in a competitive market.

## A Sterling Track Record

Produce Pro Software has long been a pioneer in the fresh ERP industry in North America, setting the standard for operational efficiency and integration. Founded more than 30 years ago, the software has helped countless businesses streamline their processes, ensure product quality and enforce compliance at every step.

## Keeping Customers on the Cutting Edge

Aptean Fresh Produce ERP is hosted on the robust Microsoft Azure cloud offering a SaaS-native solution that ensures scalability, security and seamless integration. What's more, the system's AI-powered features transform data into actionable insights and empower your team to make smart decisions.

## The Beginning of a New Era

The acquisition of Produce Pro Software by Aptean has led to further innovation and growth. By integrating our proprietary technology, we've significantly enhanced the software's capabilities. Between built-in warehouse management capabilities, recall functionalities and more, every business need is covered.

## Experienced Professionals at Your Back

The experts at Produce Pro and Aptean know the fresh produce segment through first-hand experience and careers spanning decades. We understand the unique challenges that businesses like yours face, and that's why we've developed our ERP software to help you overcome them.





## The Microsoft Dynamics 365 Business Central Difference

Microsoft Dynamics 365 Business Central is the latest generation of Microsoft's platform for business solutions, and it's been nothing short of revolutionary for the ERP market. It builds upon the successful Dynamics NAV but also offers a variety of additional advantages.

- › **Airtight cybersecurity** – Business Central solutions are hosted in the world's most secure cloud, kept resilient to cybercriminals by Microsoft's experts and technology.
- › **Unified data** – ERPs on Business Central benefit from centralized data management, which syncs information across apps and departments, creating a single source of the truth.
- › **Routine process automation** – With built-in capabilities and the new Copilot AI assistant, you can automate routine tasks with Business Central ERPs to save time and reduce the risk of human error.
- › **Integration with other Microsoft apps** – Outlook, Teams, Word, Excel and other popular Microsoft programs natively integrate with Business Central ERPs, so you can import and export files seamlessly.
- › **Evergreen development** – ERP systems built on Business Central are under continuous development and improvement, and updates are automatic, so you're always on the latest version.

The next generation of ERPs is on Business Central. Choosing a leading solution like Aptean Fresh Produce ERP can help secure your business's future and ensure that you have the features and functionalities you need to thrive in a dynamic marketplace.

Gold  
Microsoft  
Partner





# Aptean Fresh Produce ERP is trusted by:



## About Aptean

Aptean is a global provider of industry-specific software that helps manufacturers and distributors effectively run and grow their businesses. Aptean's solutions and services help businesses of all sizes to be Ready for What's Next, Now®. Aptean is headquartered in Alpharetta, Georgia and has offices in North America, Europe and Asia-Pacific.

To learn more about Aptean and the markets we serve, visit [www.aptean.com](http://www.aptean.com).

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