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**Significant factors affecting the forced-air cooling process of  
polylined horticultural produce**

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degree of

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## Abstract

New Zealand is the world's third biggest producer of kiwifruit, with 94 % of the kiwifruit produced exported (NZ \$ 1.0 bn in 2014). Forced-air cooling of the produce (from the harvest temperature of about 20 °C to near storage temperature of 0 °C) immediately after harvest improves storage potential and maintains produce quality before transportation to market. The design of the kiwifruit packaging system influences the rate of cooling and temperature achieved, mainly by affecting the airflow within and throughout the package.

The typical kiwifruit package contains 10.5 kg of fruit and consists of a cardboard box and polyliner bag to prevent the loss of moisture and fruit shrivelling. Individual boxes are assembled onto pallets (10 boxes to a pallet layer, 10 layers high) Open areas or vents (in the box) facilitate cooling by allowing cool air to enter and circulate throughout the package. In forced-air cooling pallets are assembled into double rows with an aisle between the rows. Cool air is sucked through the pallets by a fan in the aisle, cooling the fruit and warming the air. The air is then either blown or ducted to the refrigeration system to be re-cooled. The polyliner keeps the local humidity high near the fruit, preventing weight loss due to evaporative cooling, but, as a barrier to direct fruit to air contact, slows the cooling rate. This project investigated the impact of operating conditions and package design on the cooling performance in such systems.

A numerical model was developed (a CFD model implemented using the Fluent CFD software) that describes and predicts the temperature profiles of palletised kiwifruit packages undergoing forced-air cooling. The capability of the model to predict the fruit

temperatures in each package was quantitatively validated against experimental data. The numerical model was able to predict temperature profiles within experimental error bars over 14 h of cooling.

The numerical model was used to determine the operating point (in terms of pressure drop and flowrate across the pallet) to ensure rapid cooling of the produce without incurring excessive operational costs due to the power requirements. Results from both experimental work and the numerical model informed that there was an effective limit to the volumetric flowrate of  $0.243 \text{ L kg}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ : flowrates in excess of the limit had no or little effective benefit. This threshold flowrate is below the typical range recommended in industry for the forced-air cooling of non-polylined horticultural produce, which is  $0.5 - 2.0 \text{ L kg}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$ .

The numerical model demonstrated that the overall cooling performance (cooling rate, uniformity, power consumption and pallet throughput per week) can be improved by controlling the airflow distribution between the fastest and slowest cooling kiwifruit packages. An alternative design that channels cool air through the pallet towards the slowest cooling packages, located at the back of the pallet, by using two package designs in the same pallet, was presented.

At  $0.243 \text{ L kg}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-1}$  it was found that the pressure drop and power required to achieve equivalent cooling rates with the new design was reduced (by 24 % each) compared to the conventional design. Additionally, at the half-cooling time the cooling uniformity was improved by 19 %. The key features of the new design can be expected to be applicable for the cooling of horticultural produce involving an inner packaging liner.

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# Table of Contents

<b>List of Figures</b> .....	<b>viii</b>
<b>List of Tables</b> .....	<b>xiii</b>
<b>Nomenclature</b> .....	<b>xiv</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1. Kiwifruit industry in New Zealand .....	1
1.2. Role of packaging and forced-air cooling .....	2
1.3. Numerical model .....	3
1.4. Project aim .....	4
<b>2. Literature review</b> .....	<b>5</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	5
2.2 Postharvest operations .....	5
2.2.1 Forced-air cooling .....	6
2.2.2 Room cooling/ refrigerated storage .....	7
2.2.3 Refrigerated transportation .....	9
2.2.4 Horticultural package design .....	10
2.3 Numerical model approaches available for food processing .....	12
2.3.1 Porous medium model .....	13
2.3.2 Zonal model .....	15
2.3.3 Direct numerical simulation .....	15
2.3.4 Alternative numerical models .....	16
2.4 Numerical schemes .....	17
2.4.1 Finite difference .....	17
2.4.2 Finite element .....	18
2.4.3 Finite volume .....	19
2.5 Transport equations in the finite volume scheme .....	20
2.4.1 Mass transport .....	21
2.4.2 Momentum transport .....	21
2.4.3 Wall functions .....	26
2.4.4 Energy transport .....	27
2.6 Transport mechanisms in the cooling of horticultural produce .....	29
2.6.1 Convective heat transfer .....	29
2.6.2 Conductive heat transfer .....	30
2.6.3 Radiative heat transfer .....	30
2.6.4 Heat transfer in forced-air cooling .....	31
2.7 CFD applications in the postharvest cold chain .....	31
2.7.1 Refrigerated rooms .....	32
2.7.2 Ventilated packages during forced-air cooling .....	32

2.7.3 Transport equipment .....	34
2.7.4 Domestic refrigeration .....	35
2.7.5 Future of numerical modelling in postharvest operations .....	36
2.8 Conclusions .....	37
<b>3. Research objectives .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>4. Characterising the forced-air cooling performance of polylined modular bulk packs .....</b>	<b>41</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	41
4.2 Industrial experiments .....	42
4.2.1 Objectives .....	42
4.2.2 Methods .....	42
4.2.3 Temperature logging .....	47
4.2.4 Data analysis .....	48
4.2.5 Industrial results .....	49
4.2.6 Conclusions (industrial experiments) .....	55
4.3 Laboratory experiments .....	57
4.3.1 Objectives .....	57
4.4 Methods .....	58
4.4.1 Design of forced-air cooling simulator .....	58
4.4.2 Experimental structure .....	64
4.4.3 Experimental measurements .....	65
4.4.4 Experimental set-up .....	70
4.4.5 Moisture loss .....	71
4.4.6 Data analysis .....	71
4.5 Laboratory experiment results .....	73
4.5.1 Commercial pallet orientation (1.0 m orientation) .....	74
4.5.2 Alternative pallet orientation (1.2 m orientation) .....	81
4.5.3 Moisture loss .....	87
4.6 Laboratory experiments conclusions .....	89
4.6.1 Heat transfer mechanisms .....	89
4.6.2 Informing numerical model development .....	89
<b>5. Numerical model development .....</b>	<b>91</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	91
5.2 Objectives .....	92
5.2.1 Software package .....	92
5.3 Geometrical model .....	92
5.3.1 Kiwifruit physical model .....	93
5.3.2 Cardboard box .....	94
5.3.3 Modular bulk pack .....	97
5.4 Pallet footprint .....	101
5.4.1 Mesh generation .....	102



5.5	Transport phenomenon during forced-air cooling .....	104
5.5.1	Flow regimes in the numerical model .....	106
5.5.2	Heat transfer mechanisms in the numerical model .....	108
5.5.3	Transport equations in the numerical model .....	114
5.6	Numerical setup .....	118
5.6.1	Material thermophysical properties .....	118
5.6.2	Problem setup .....	119
5.6.3	Numerical simulation .....	121
5.6.4	Iterative convergence .....	122
5.7	Conclusions .....	123
<b>6.</b>	<b>Impact of the thermal characterisation of the process on the numerical model .....</b>	<b>125</b>
6.1.	Introduction .....	125
6.2.	Objectives .....	125
6.3.	Methods .....	126
6.4.	Sensitivity of the numerical model results to the thermal property input values .....	126
6.4.1	Thermophysical properties of air .....	126
6.4.2	Thermophysical properties of kiwifruit .....	128
6.4.3	Thermophysical properties of cardboard and polyliner .....	130
6.5.	Numerical results .....	131
6.6.	Conclusions.....	132
<b>7.</b>	<b>Numerical model validation .....</b>	<b>133</b>
7.1.	Introduction .....	133
7.2.	Experimental system for validation .....	133
7.2.1	Experimental system setup .....	134
7.2.2	Experimental methods .....	135
7.3.	Model validation simulations .....	136
7.4.	Validation methods .....	139
7.5.	Comparison of numerical and experimental temperatures .....	139
7.5.1	Comparison of the numerical and experimental temperature profiles .....	139
7.5.2	Comparison of the numerical and experimental HCT and SECT.....	143
7.5.3	Experimental uncertainties .....	145
7.6.	Conclusions .....	146
<b>8.</b>	<b>Numerical model applications .....</b>	<b>147</b>
8.1.	Introduction .....	147
8.2.	Objectives .....	148
8.3.	Operating conditions investigated and power calculations .....	148
8.3.1	Operating conditions .....	148

8.3.2 Power requirements .....	150
8.4. Optimal operating point .....	151
8.4.1 Numerical results .....	152
8.5. Significant factors affecting the cooling performance .....	156
8.5.1 Impact of air flowrate and pressure drop on the cooling performance .....	156
8.5.2 Impact of air temperature on the cooling performance .....	159
8.6. Air flowrate and temperature distribution within the pallet .....	160
8.6.1 Air flowrate and temperature distribution within MBPs .....	160
8.6.2 Air flowrate and temperature distribution between MBPs .....	163
8.7. Alternative MBP design .....	164
8.7.1 Geometry .....	165
8.7.2 Comparison methods .....	168
8.7.3 Results .....	168
8.8. Conclusions .....	177
<b>9. Discussion .....</b>	<b>179</b>
9.1 Introduction .....	179
9.2 Output of project in terms of the wider field of postharvest research.....	179
9.3 Specific challenges and data sets required in the project .....	181
9.4 Major findings of the study .....	183
9.4.1 Experimental .....	183
9.4.2 Numerical model .....	184
9.4.3 Improving cooling performance .....	185
9.5 Application of numerical model findings .....	188
9.6 Potential data sets to enhance and expand the numerical model .....	190
9.6.1 Including moisture loss and transfer in the numerical model .....	193
9.7 Recommendations .....	196
9.7.1 Industrial tunnel coolers.....	196
9.7.2 Developing a numerical model of polylined horticultural produce.....	196
9.7.3 Differences between cooling of polylined and non-polylined horticultural produce .....	197
9.7.4 Improving the cooling performance of polylined horticultural produce .....	198
<b>References .....</b>	<b>199</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>211</b>
A1 Further numerical model testing .....	211
A2 Thermocouple location .....	229
A3 Published papers .....	231

## List of Figures

Figure 1.1. Summary of the cold chain in New Zealand for horticultural produce .....	1
Figure 2.1. Tunnel cooler: the most common forced-air cooling device. The fan creates a vacuum which draws refrigerated air through two palletized rows of horticulture produce. ....	6
Figure 2.2. Refrigerated storage room for horticulture produce. Evaporator fans circulate refrigerated air through the room .....	8
Figure 2.3. Pathways of air in a shipping container, for horticulture produce, featuring an integral unit with a bottom-air delivery system .....	9
Figure 2.4. Refrigerated truck with a top-air delivery system .....	10
Figure 2.5. The modular bulk pack (MBP) for Hayward green kiwifruit .....	12
Figure 4.1. Kiwifruit pallet with MBPs numbered 1 – 10 and pallet layers “A” – “J” .....	43
Figure 4.2. Reduced pallet row of MBPs 1 - 10, for air pulled through (a) the 1.0 m pallet orientation and (b) the 1.2 pallet orientation, on the basis of axial symmetry. “X” denotes location of thermocouples to measure air temperatures .....	44
Figure 4.3. Approximate location of kiwifruit in the top and bottom kiwifruit layers for MBP 1 in layers “E” and “F” of the 1.0 m pallet orientation .....	46
Figure 4.4. Kiwifruit as packed in a commercial facility (a) excluding and (b) including Type-T thermocouples to monitor the kiwifruit temperature in MBP 1 .....	46
Figure 4.5. Pallet positions in an industrial tunnel cooler for the (a) 1.0 m and (b) 1.2 m orientation .....	47
Figure 4.6. Air temperature change at the inlet vent of each MBP in a pallet row for (a) the 1.0 m orientation and (b) the 1.2 m orientation over 10 h of cooling in industry .....	52
Figure 4.7. Average fractional unaccomplished temperature change, from the start of the forced-air cooling for (a) the 1.0 m orientation and (b) the 1.2 m orientation .....	52
Figure 4.8 Variable speed drive fan attached to a half-pallet of kiwifruit trays inside a cool room to simulate precooling .....	59

Figure 4.9. Dimensions for the variable speed drive fan, orifice plate, pressure tappings, upstream and downstream cylinder lengths and interface to attach to horticultural produce pallet to simulate forced-air cooling .....	60
Figure 4.10. Plot of the measured volumetric flow rate (n = 5) against the theoretical flowrate (with a discharge coefficient of 1) calculated from the pressure drop across an orifice plate to find the actual discharge coefficient.....	64
Figure 4.11 Half-pallet layout with layers assigned letters "A"-"E" .....	65
Figure 4.12 Kiwifruit packed in a cubic centred distribution (a) excluding and (b) including the Type-T thermocouples to monitor the kiwifruit temperature .....	67
Figure 4.13. Cubic centred distribution and thermocouple location for kiwifruit.....	68
Figure 4.14. Schematic diagram for the cardboard box used in MBPs of kiwifruit .....	70
Figure 4.15. Temperatures during forced-air cooling of (a) air pulled past the inlet vent of each MBP in a pallet row and (b) average temperature change of each MBP in pallet row "B" for the 1.0 m orientation .....	74
Figure 4.16. Average fractional unaccomplished temperature change, during cooling for each MBP in a pallet row for the 1.0 m orientation .....	76
Figure 4.17. Plot of (a) airflow and pressure drop across the pallet as a function of fan speed with LSD bars and (b) airflow as a function of pressure drop for both pallet orientations .....	82
Figure 4.18. Airflow pathways pulled through the pallet (a) without and (b) with gaps between MBPs for both the 1.0 m and 1.2 m orientation .....	82
Figure 4.19. Air temperature change at the inlet vent of each MBP in a pallet row during cooling for the 1.2 m orientation .....	84
Figure 4.20. Average fractional unaccomplished temperature change, during cooling for each box in a pallet row for the (a) 1.0 m orientation (same data presented in Figure 4.12 and (b) 1.2 m orientation) and (b) for the 1.0 m orientation .....	86
Figure 4.21. Mass change of MBPs 5 – 7 in the 1.2 m pallet orientation during forced-air cooling .....	88
Figure 5.1. The raised view of Hayward green kiwifruit drawn along the xy-axis in Design Modeler .....	93
Figure 5.2. The (a) flat view of Hayward green kiwifruit along the xz-plane in DesignModeler and (b) 3D outline of the kiwifruit .....	94
Figure 5.3. Completed construction of an anatomically correct 3D Hayward green kiwifruit, formed by joining the individual surfaces together .....	95

Figure 5.4. Image of (a) photo of front view (b) photo of end view (c) simplified geometry schematic diagram and (d) the numerical model construction of the cardboard box .....	96
Figure 5.5. Image of (a) photo and (b) the numerical model construction of the bottom layer of count 36 kiwifruit in the modular bulk pack .....	98
Figure 5.6. Image of (a) photo and (b) the numerical model construction of the bottom and second layer of count 36 kiwifruit in the modular bulk pack .....	98
Figure 5.7. Image of (a) independent polyliner shape and (b) effective polyliner surface and kiwifruit bulk .....	99
Figure 5.8. Image of (a) photo of a Hayward green kiwifruit modular bulk pack alongside (b) isometric (c) long-side and (d) short-side view of the numerical model construction containing 100 fruit, the effective polyliner surface and the cardboard box .....	100
Figure 5.9. Half-pallet layout with layers "A"- "E" and MBPs 1 – 10. Refrigerated air is pulled through the 1.0 m pallet face during forced-air cooling .....	101
Figure 5.10. (a) numerical construct and (b) 3D schematic diagram of the computational pallet layer for the forced-air cooling of a single pallet layer, when air is pulled through 1.0 m pallet face .....	102
Figure 5.11. (a) Location of cross-sectional area for MBP 1 and ¼ view of MBP 1; computational grid of (b) MBP 1 and (c) ¼ view of MBP 1.....	104
Figure 5.12. The primary external heat transfer mechanisms for MBP 1 during forced-air cooling .....	105
Figure 5.13. Some of the internal heat transfer mechanisms for a MBP of polylined kiwifruit during forced-air cooling, where the primary airflow direction is perpendicular to the hand vents .....	106
Figure 7.1. Wire mesh and insulated test duct attachments for the forced-air cooling system .....	135
Figure 7.2. (a) Schematic diagram, including the wire mesh and fan system, and (b) photo of the insulated test duct, containing 5 layers of kiwifruit MBPs, to validate the numerical model .....	135
Figure 7.3. Cubic centred distribution and thermocouple location for kiwifruit in (a) MBPs 1 – 4 and (b) MBP 5 – 7 .....	137
Figure 7.4 Half-pallet layout with layers assigned letters "A"- "E". Air is pulled through the 1.0 m pallet .....	137
Figure 7.5. Comparison between predicted and experimental numerical average temperatures, during 14 h of forced-air cooling from an approximate initial product temperature of 20 °C at 0.34 L kg <sup>-1</sup> s <sup>-1</sup> .....	140

Figure 7.6. Comparison between predicted and experimental numerical average temperatures, during 14 h of forced-air cooling from an approximate initial product temperature of 20 °C at 0.51 L kg <sup>-1</sup> s <sup>-1</sup> .....	141
Figure 7.7. Comparison between predicted and experimental numerical average temperatures, during 14 h of forced-air cooling from an approximate initial product temperature of 20 °C at 0.71 L kg <sup>-1</sup> s <sup>-1</sup> .....	142
Figure 7.8. Predicted and experimental cooling times for MBPs 1 – 7 at 0.34 L kg <sup>-1</sup> s <sup>-1</sup> .....	143
Figure 7.9. Predicted and experimental cooling times for MBPs 1 – 7 at 0.51 L kg <sup>-1</sup> s <sup>-1</sup> .....	144
Figure 7.10. Predicted and experimental cooling times for MBPs 1 – 7 at 0.71 L kg <sup>-1</sup> s <sup>-1</sup> .....	144
Figure 8.1. Reduced pallet layer of MBPs 1 – 10, on the basis of axial symmetry .....	149
Figure 8.2. HCT of slowest cooling MBP and no. of pallets that can be cooled to this HCT per week against (a) pressure drop per pallet (b) flowrate per pallet and (c) total power requirement .....	155
Figure 8.3. Average wall function surface heat transfer coefficients between the refrigerated airflow and effective polyliner surface .....	158
Figure 8.4. Average air temperature at the inlet vents (perpendicular to the incoming refrigerated air pulled through the pallet layer) for MBPs 1 – 7 at pressure drops of (a) 25 Pa (b) 50 Pa (c) 100 Pa and (d) 200 Pa .....	159
Figure 8.5. Distribution of air velocities (m.s <sup>-1</sup> ) for an (a) top-down view and (b) isometric view, and air temperatures (°C) for an (c) top-down view and (d) isometric view.....	161
Figure 8.6. (a) Location of vertical and horizontal cross-sectional area through the pallet layer. Temperature distribution (°C) for (b) an isometric view of the kiwifruit temperature in each MBP, along the (c) vertical and (d) horizontal cross-sectional area, after 4.93 h (average pallet layer HCT) of forced air cooling for a pressure drop of 100 Pa (0.243 L kg <sup>-1</sup> s <sup>-1</sup> ).....	162
Figure 8.7. Volumetric flowrate (L kg <sup>-1</sup> s <sup>-1</sup> ) distribution between MBPs (total entering and exiting the pallet layer of 100 %) .....	163
Figure 8.8. Conceptual sketch of the primary airflow pathways through (a) current and (b) new box design .....	166
Figure 8.9. Schematic diagram for (a) the current box and (b) alternative box for MBPs 5 and 6 .....	168
Figure 8.10. Airflow distribution (total though pallet layer of 100 %) through each MBP for (a) the current and (b) the new box design .....	169

Figure 8.11. Maximum difference between average MBP temperatures in the pallet layer for the current design and alternative design tested at a constant flowrate ( $L.kg^{-1}.s^{-1}$ ) and pressure drop (Pa) .....	171
Figure 8.12. Average air temperature at the original vents (not the newly created vents) orientated towards to the incoming refrigerated air pulled through (a) the current box design (b) the new box design at the same pressure drop and (c) the new box design at the same flowrate .....	172
Figure 8.13. Distribution of air velocities ( $m s^{-1}$ ) for the new box design for an (a) top-down and (b) isometric view, and air temperatures ( $^{\circ}C$ ) for an (c) top-down and (d) isometric view. ....	173
Figure 8.14. (a) Location of vertical and horizontal cross-sectional area through the pallet layer with the new design. Temperature distribution ( $^{\circ}C$ ) for (b) an isometric view of the kiwifruit temperature in each MBP, along the (c) vertical and (d) horizontal cross-sectional area, after 4.93 h (average pallet layer HCT) of forced air cooling for a pressure drop of 100 Pa ( $0.243 L kg^{-1} s^{-1}$ ) .....	174
Figure 8.15. HCT of slowest cooling MBP and no. of pallets that can be cooled to this HCT per week, for the current and new box design against (a) pressure drop per pallet (b) flowrate per pallet and (c) power requirement .....	176
Figure 9.1. Conceptual model of the primary airflow distribution through a pallet layer of polylined horticultural produce (a) without and (b) with additional open areas to promote air bypass channelling through some packages at the side of the pallet .....	186
Figure 9.2. Expected airflow distribution within a ventilated package of polylined horticultural produce (a) without and (b) with additional open areas to promote airflow bypass channelling .....	189

## List of Tables

Table 4.1. Kiwifruit location within MBP 1, temperature drop and amount of cooling that has occurred during the forced-air cooling period in the 1.0 m pallet orientation. Data represents the average of 2 data points .....	55
Table 4.2. Average HCT and SECT as influenced by box location, subdivision within box and pallet layer for the 1.0 m pallet orientation .....	75
Table 4.3. Point velocities (n = 12) and airflow measured at the orifice plate (n = 18) for the 1.0 m pallet orientation at a fan speed of 1500 rpm .....	77
Table 4.4. Air velocities for MBPs 1 and 5 (n = 12) in the 1.0 m orientation and for MBPs 5 and 7 (n = 24) and MBP 6 (n = 12) in the 1.2 m orientation and airflow measured at the orifice plate (n = 18) pulled through both pallet orientations for a fan speed of 1500 rpm .....	85
Table 4.5. Average HCT and SECT as influenced pallet orientation .....	86
Table 4.6. Average HCT and SECT as influenced by general box location in each pallet orientation, pallet layer and pallet orientations for both pallet orientations .....	87
Table 5.1. Material properties of the air and solid materials, in the numerical model .....	118
Table 6.1. Dry matter content of Hayward ( <i>Actinidia deliciosa</i> ) kiwifruit harvested in New Zealand .....	129
Table 6.2. Specific heat capacity and thermal conductivity models for foods based on the water content .....	129
Table 6.3. Thermophysical properties of the corrugated cardboard and polyethylene liner .....	130
Table 6.4. Sensitivity input range for fluid and solid thermophysical properties .....	130
Table 6.5. Sensitivity analysis for the impact of thermal properties on the numerical model .....	131
Table 7.1. Fan speeds, flowrate and corresponding pressure drop across the half-pallet tested .....	137
Table 8.1. HCT, and the relative reduction in HCT, between the tested pressure drops/air flowrates for MBPs 1 – 7 in a pallet layer .....	156
Table 8.2. HCT for each MBP and the pallet layer average for the current box design and the new box design. Comparisons are provided at both constant flowrate and constant pressure drop .....	170



## Nomenclature

### English Symbols

A – area,  $\text{m}^2$

B – ratio of outer to inner diameter, dimensionless

$C_D$  – discharge coefficient

$C_p$  – specific heat at constant pressure,  $\text{J kg}^{-1} \text{K}^{-1}$

d – inner diameter, m

D – outer diameter, m

$D_H$  – hydraulic diameter (m)

E – energy per unit mass,  $\text{J kg}^{-1}$

g – gravity,  $\text{m s}^{-2}$

G – generation of turbulent kinetic energy,  $\text{kg m}^{-1} \text{s}^{-3}$

Gr – Grashof number, dimensionless

h – specific enthalpy,  $\text{J kg}^{-1}$

I – unit tensor

J – diffusion flux,  $\text{kg m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$

k – thermal conductivity,  $\text{W m}^{-1} \text{K}^{-1}$

l – length scale, m

L – characteristic length, m

m – mass, kg

n – number of replicates

p – pressure, Pa

P – power, W

Pr – Prandtl number, dimensionless

q – heat flow rate, W

Q – volumetric flowrate,  $\text{m}^3 \text{s}^{-1}$

Re – Reynolds number, dimensionless

RH – Relative Humidity, %

t – time, s

T – temperature, K

u, v, w – velocity magnitude,  $\text{m s}^{-1}$

$\vec{v}$  – overall velocity vector,  $\text{m s}^{-1}$

x, y, z – Cartesian coordinates, m

X – mass fraction, dimensionless

Y – Fractional Unaccomplished Temperature Change, dimensionless

### **Greek Symbols**

$\beta$  – thermal expansion coefficient,  $\text{K}^{-1}$

$\varepsilon$  – turbulent dissipation rate,  $\text{m}^2 \text{s}^{-3}$

$\kappa$  – turbulent kinetic energy,  $\text{m}^2 \text{s}^{-2}$

$\lambda$  – latent heat,  $\text{kJ kg}^{-1}$

$\rho$  – density,  $\text{kg m}^{-3}$

$\tau$  – stress tensor,  $\text{N m}^{-2}$

$\mu$  – viscosity,  $\text{kg m}^{-1} \text{s}^{-1}$

$\nu$  – kinematic viscosity,  $\text{m}^2 \text{s}^{-1}$

$\sigma$  – Stefan Boltzmann constant,  $5.67 \times 10^{-8} \text{ J m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1} \text{ K}^{-4}$

$\sigma_\varepsilon$  – turbulent Prandtl number for  $\varepsilon$ , dimensionless

$\sigma_\kappa$  – turbulent Prandtl number for  $\kappa$ , dimensionless

$\omega$  – turbulent specific dissipation rate,  $\text{s}^{-1}$

### **Miscellaneous Symbols**

$\epsilon$  - emissivity, dimensionless

### **Mathematical operators**

$d$  – total derivative

$\Delta$  – difference (i.e. change in variable)

$\delta_{ij}$  – Kronecker delta function

$\partial$  – partial derivative

$\nabla$  – partial derivative with respect to all directions in Cartesian space

### **Subscripts**

a – species “a”

b – buoyancy

f – fruit

i, j, k – vector directions in Cartesian coordinates

t – turbulent

eff – effective

w – water

### **Constants**

$C_{\mu}$ ,  $C_{1\varepsilon}$ ,  $C_{2\varepsilon}$ ,  $C_{3\varepsilon}$  – constants for  $\kappa$ - $\varepsilon$  turbulent model

### **Abbreviations**

CAT– Computerized Axial Tomography

FUTC – Fractional Unaccomplished Temperature Change, -

h.t.c – heat transfer coefficient,  $\text{W m}^{-2} \text{K}^{-1}$

HCT – Half Cooling Time, h

LSD – Least Squares Difference

MBP – Modular Bulk Pack

rpm – revolutions per minute ( $\text{min}^{-1}$ )

rps – revolutions per second ( $\text{s}^{-1}$ )

SECT – Seven Eights Cooling Time, h

TCR – Temperature Control Room

VSD – Variable Speed Drive