

## Good Equipment, People Means Substantial Dollar Savings for Florida Grocer



**Associated Grocers Vice President of Operations Christopher Miller: RR 5000 Series earns praise for its durability and greater uptime. All of which leads to a significant dollar savings for the company, Miller says.**

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**Workers move daily more than 75,000 cases of product in-and-out of Associated Grocers’ Miami, Florida warehouse. It’s a demanding workload, requiring the right combination of people and equipment.**

Vice President of Operations Christopher Miller describes it like this: “You take a good man and give them a good piece of equipment and you will get the job done. You take a good man without a good piece of equipment, and you’ve got a good man.”

Simply put: people and equipment – specifically, Crown lift trucks – must move grocery goods every day, 24 hours each day during numerous work shifts in the tough “wear and tear” grocery warehouse environment.

In this type of business, durability drives success; success equates into cost savings for this 500,000 square foot facility. Miller agrees, saying Crown products – a fleet of more than 60 lift trucks – have created cost savings for Associated Grocers, allowing them to serve affiliated stores in the southeastern United States, the Caribbean and Latin America.

Eight RR 5000 Series Reach Trucks (six are used in a freezer environment) earn praise from

Miller. “The 5000 Series goes beyond speed and efficiency,” he says. “We really love this truck’s durability. It’s built to last and that’s a necessity in our business.”

Durability means greater uptime. The latter, Miller will tell you, means savings for the company especially when comparing Crown to the competition. Savings, he believes, can reach as much as 11 percent per truck.

“I guarantee that we are saving, even though the up front costs are higher, a minimum of \$3,000 monthly or \$36,000 a year,” Miller emphasizes. “Remember we’re talking raw cost. We’re also not talking about the operator downtime that has been saved.”

Major losses occur when a machine experiences downtime. “For example, when you operate 24 hours a day like we do and lose a truck for three days, you are looking at 15 percent of the cost of the truck for that month. That’s 15 percent of the leased amount not being utilized,” Miller explains.

All Associated Grocers equipment is on a four-year residual lease with full maintenance. Planned maintenance and parts



**The Crown PE Series 3000 rider pallet trucks, model 3540-60, also receives positive reviews from Association Grocers especially for their durability. The company uses the 93-inch forks to better keep up with customer demands, allowing workers to move more products.**

availability are major sticklers in Miller's viewpoint.

"Crown trucks, properly maintained, have a great ratio when it comes to up time," says Miller. Openly enthusiastic about parts consignment, he describes it as a "win-win" for both Associated and Crown. Parts availability earns a high rating from Miller.

"Many times with other companies we would get stuck with overnight expenses when ordering a part. With Crown, we have never had that problem," he says. "We view the parts consignment program as helping both of us."

In this fast paced warehouse, approximately 400,000 square feet is dedicated to groceries; another 60,000 square feet to perishables; and the remainder for offices.

Associated Grocers ships more than \$370 million worth of goods, ranging from "soup to nuts", involving more than 25,000 stock keeping units (SKU).

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Thirty-nine Crown pallet trucks, both PE and PC Series 3000, handle the bulk of the transportation and picking work. Most have the 93-inch double pallet forks. "Our fastest (picking) workers use the PCs," he says. "They absolutely love the fact there's no stepping up. They like to be able to walk through."

Industry time studies indicate PCs reduce the number of steps, resulting in a time saving for pickers – some of these workers may pick upwards to 3,500 cases per shift.

"One study says you save 10 seconds every time you pick up a case. I know that doesn't seem like much but if you're picking 2,000 cases-plus per shift – take that by 10 seconds and you do generate a considerable time saving. It's especially important to workers if they are paid by piece," Miller says.

The PE Series 3000 trucks are also popular because of their ergonomic advantages like operator foot space, operator handle with raise and lower functions and the reverse button.

"It goes back to durability. Take for example, the reverse button. Some machines are so cheap it may not operate when you need it. Crown products are made very durable and with the heavy operation that goes on during a workday that's important. You know those functions are going to work," he says.

The same holds true for their use of Crown's SC Series, a sit-down counterbalanced forklift. Associated uses these trucks to move heavier, larger pallets of products into open storage areas. "Almost two years in a heavy, tough environment and we have experienced absolutely no problem with them," says Miller. "They are a workhorse in the industry."

Safety plays a big part in selecting Crown, according to Miller. Miller calls the new 5000 Series reach truck "the safest piece of equipment that I've ever seen from a company."

"When you think safety, you think of Crown. They are built to last," he says.

With more than 165 operators, Associated Grocers offers a total training program offering their own specific program coupled with materials from Crown. "Our people are fork lift certified from day one," says Miller.

# Associated Grocers' Operators Feel Sense of Ownership with Crown Lift Trucks

**Lift truck operators at Associated Grocers' warehouse in Miami, Florida remain very loyal to Crown lift trucks and their actions speak louder than words.**

After their shifts, some operators have been known to secure their trucks with a chain, preventing others from using the equipment. Some have even tucked their trucks conveniently away in an obscure warehouse corner.

This group of operators has a definite sense of ownership to Crown products. Many have their names stenciled on the side of their truck, taking great pride in the equipment. This attitude was initially developed during the decision-making process leading to the purchase of Crown lift trucks.

Vice President of Operations Christopher Miller said several different lift truck companies were brought to demonstrate their products including the brand operators were using at the time. Associated made the decision. "They chose Crown," says Miller.

The process helped the operators' further build on their ownership of the lift truck. "We also strongly believe in giving our people their own machine,"

he says. "We even put their name on the truck."

The company offers operators incentives to keep their lift trucks clean and in good shape. During breaks, it's not uncommon for an operator to be seen polishing their truck. Considering the tough grocery warehouse environment, the trucks remain in remarkably good condition.

Operators, like longtime employee Emmitt Nichols, love the equipment. With Associated Grocers for more than 26 years, Nichols has driven five different narrow aisle trucks. The RR 5000 Series he drives now is the best, he believes. He also appreciates the advantages the truck offers.

"One of the main things I like is the comfort.... This truck is like night and day. I feel much more comfortable at the end of the day," says Nichols, who usually works between eight and 12 hours daily. "In some of the trucks we had before after six hours or so it felt like I was working on concrete."



**Not only does the RR 5000 Series Reach allow Associated Grocers to save money because of its durability, operators, like Emmitt Nichols, prefer to use the reach truck because of the operator comforts it provides.**

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**"They are a workhorse in the industry" is how Associated Grocers describes their Series SC sit-down counterbalanced forklifts. Easy access on and off the truck, power steering and visibility are other plusses for the SC.**

***"There's really no comparison to the previous trucks. I didn't know about Crown before but it's like comparing the best type of car you can think of to the worst."***

He adds: "There's really no comparison to the previous trucks. I didn't know about Crown before but it's like comparing the best type of car you can think of to the worst."

Nichols points out the compartment, fan and lights are all comforts that allow him to do a better job. "I think I can cut down at least two hours per day. You are able to work at a real good speed and deliver a lot of groceries. In the older trucks, it would have taken a lot longer," he says.

One of Associated Grocers top order selectors, Juan Lanzas agrees speed and comfort provide him advantage. For Lanzas, since his pay-

check is based on the number of cases selected, reliability from his Series PC remains critical.

"The Crown does not have to be fixed as often especially the wheels," he says.

Willie Jackson, a 22-year veteran forklift operator, prefers his Series SC sit-down counterbalanced fork lift. "I like everything about this truck," he says. "It's easier to get on and off the truck. The steering is easier, faster and more comfortable. I can also see through the mast better."

Another loyal Crown user, Jackson keeps his SC in great shape, having won the company's overall appearance judging in the SC division five straight times.



**The easy step and accessibility to both sides have made the Crown PC Series 3000, Model 3540, popular with Associated Grocers and their workers. Again, the truck's reliability has been very important for the company.**

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