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EMERGING TIMES

... growing toward the future

Innovation, technology on California farms impress class



Lisa Lochridge, Sonia Tighe and members of FFVA's Emerging Leader Development Program visit D'Arrigo Bros. Co.

Members of Class 3 of FFVA's Emerging Leader Development Program spent three days touring farms and packing and shipping operations throughout California's Salinas Valley this June 23-27. The 11 young professionals visited with growers of a variety of specialty crops, some of which they hadn't seen before -- including artichokes and mushrooms.

It was the final session for the class before the group graduates at FFVA's annual convention Sept. 17-19 in Naples.

Class members said they were struck by the size and scope of California operations and impressed by the innovation and technology they saw on various farms and produce processing plants. Growers shared their concerns, listing availability of labor and water as the

two biggest challenges.

The group saw production of numerous crops, including strawberries, lettuce and leafy greens, celery, mushrooms and peppers. They also toured processing plants that produce bagged salads and leaf lettuce for retail and foodservice customers. They met with representatives from C.H. Robinson, Ramsay Highlander, the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California and the United Fresh Produce Association.

Tour stops included California Giant Berry Farms, Gizdich Ranch, Duda, Taylor Farms California, Mann Packing, Ocean Mist Farms, Church Brothers, Uesugi Farms, D'Arrigo Bros., Monterey Mushrooms, Tanimura & Antle and Bianchi Vineyard.





A family farming legacy since 1923



by Cathy Atchley
On Point Ag

D'Arrigo Bros. Co. grows and ships leafy greens, cole crops and specialty items such as cactus pear, broccoli rabe, fennel and nopalitos. On our visit, we met with Claudia Pizarro-Villalobos and Mark Houle. Claudia gave us a historical look and overview of the crops, size, and scope of their operation. Mark guided us through the tour of their cooling facility.

It's fascinating learning about family farming operations. Founded in 1923 by brothers Andrea and Stefano D'Arrigo (immigrants from Sicily), D'Arrigo Bros. has used the Andy Boy label since 1927. At just 3 years old, Andy D'Arrigo became the face of Andy Boy produce. Today, at 90 years young, Andy still stays active in the office. In fact, he stopped and spoke with our group while we were there.

Sitting on 50 acres, D'Arrigo's state-of-the-art cooling facility has 28 bay doors and uses three main cooling mechanisms: forced-air cooling, vacuum cooling and a hydro cooling ice chamber. Because some crops may not be ice tolerant, other cooling techniques can be employed.

As we walked the yard, we learned that all of their crops are field packed, then delivered to the cooling facility. After cooling, produce is moved into the cold storage facility before it is shipped to its final destination. We also learned that you'll find a pink ribbon on the labels of Andy Boy products year-round. In addition to the company's donations toward breast cancer research, the pink you'll see on Andy Boy labels is another way to raise awareness and remind consumers of its goal to help find a cure.



Mark Houle at D'Arrigo Brox. guides the group through the cooling process.

Influencing the future of production



by Ryan Atwood
KeyPlex

Ramsay Highlander is a manufacturer of specialized harvesting equipment for the produce industry. Ramsay stands at the forefront of using new technologies for labor-assisting harvest and has introduced some innovative designs.

The company is widely known for a nationwide and international client base. Owner Frank Maconachy discussed going to work for his father-in-law, who founded the company. Maconachy had been working as an engineer for a military contractor. His knowledge of military technology for precision applications is coming in handy as these technologies are becoming available for use to the general public.

Maconachy shared some of the recent innovations, which included specialized equipment that can be used to thin a crop of lettuce and machines that reduce the amount of hand labor required for agricultural production. He and his team of engineers and machinists are constantly trying to produce new technology for their clients and in the process are influencing the future of agriculture production.



Clayton Norman watches pepper grading and packing at Uesugi Farms.

Off to a great start at Uesugi Farms



by Matt Stacey
Crop Production Services

On day one, the tour bus rolled out onto Highway 25 with our group valiantly fighting off various forms of fatigue – most likely from a combination of jet lag and late-night festivities. The situation demanded an interesting and entertaining first stop. Pete Aiello of Uesugi Farms was up to the task.

Aiello's family came from Sicily to upstate New York at the turn of the century and tried to grow tomatoes. In 1920, a brother and sister made their way to San Jose. "Upon their arrival into this magical place known as California, they decided they were never going back and sent for the rest of their family. That brother who made the original journey was my great-grandfather," Aiello said.

Today the operation has 4,000 acres do-

mestically and 1,500 acres in Mexico. Peppers and chiles comprise most of the acres, but some spinach, sweet corn, pumpkins and strawberries are also produced. Additionally, Uesugi Farms is a fully integrated grower, packer and shipper.

Trust is a key component in the Mexico operations, Aiello said, because money must be advanced for a crop to be produced. In 1997, Aiello bought eight truckloads of fresh produce from Mexico that did not make it far before the loads spoiled. The Aiellos worked harder and invested more with their Mexican partners until the challenges were met. Today, they ship more than 2,000 truckloads of produce a year, supplying customers year-round. Without the Mexican operation there would be a significant gap in the winter, Aiello said.

"I grew up working in the fields since about age 7, which allowed me to gain experience on just about every job the production side of the operation could offer," said Aiello, who has been part owner and general manager since 2004. "My dad is 70 years old and still comes to work every day. My kids are coming along and hopefully will carry on with the family business."

Rich history with a bright future



by Geoff Roe
Wm. G. Roe & Sons

Our visit to Tanimura and Antle started with a stop in an artisan lettuce field with Helena Beckett as our guide. T&A grows its artisan lettuce and various other crops on 30,000 acres either owned or leased. In one sizable field we observed their eight-row beds of red and green lettuce, planted in a pattern of four "gem" varieties all specifically developed by T&A to compete with spring mix in the marketplace. The planting pattern, which appeared critical to the harvesting effort, allowed each harvester to cut and package one of each variety into a clamshell.

After touring the growing side of Tanimura and Antle, we visited their gorgeous company headquarters for a history lesson. The partnership of the Tanimura and Antle families began in 1982. The Tanimuras have a rich growing history, which made the partnership with the Antle family -- whose primary focus has been the packaging, marketing, sales side of the business -- a seamless fit. The partnership has proven to be more than successful, employing 2,500 employees. Two hundred of them have been with T&A for 20-plus years.

Our tour concluded with a lunch on the grounds of company headquarters, and the view from the valley floor certainly didn't disappoint. As we ate lunch, a test plot for T&A's breeding program could be seen in an adjacent field which included a rainbow of color change from variety to variety. Having already been convinced of T&A's commitment to the future, their obvious commitment to varietal innovation was impressive.



Mann Packing shows ingenuity in solutions



by Jordan Theis

Mann Packing pulled back the curtain for our leadership class and allowed us to see the inner workings of its elaborate fresh-cut vegetable operation in Salinas. Operating the controls of this efficient business is President Mike Jarrard. He took us on a tour from field to packing house. The high-tech field equipment used by Mann

Packing made it obvious that Jarrard is an engineer turned farmer. Yield maximization techniques and process efficiencies have been analyzed to the nth degree to ensure that product meets Mann's exacting quality standards. It is a testament to the company's ingenuity that it has been able to adapt to the constant business pressure in agriculture.

Problem: Wholesale vegetable buyers use their buying leverage to squeeze the grower's profit margins. The Mann Solution: Engineer a cutting system that maximizes the harvested yield of field vegetables, allowing more product to be sold while not having to increase input costs.

Problem: A severe labor shortage has strangled the Salinas Valley, causing some fields to go unplanted or unharvested vegetables to rot in the field.

The Mann Solution: Partner with technology companies to create state-of-the-art planting and harvesting equipment that reduces the need for scarce labor resources, effectively lowering their input costs as well.

Silicon Valley technology companies may grab the headlines with the latest social networking fad. But when it comes to real-world problems, it seems that solutions are being created 50 miles south of Silicon Valley at American farming company Mann Packing.



Mike Jarrard and Mike Costa hosted the group at Mann Packing in Salinas.





Science, chemistry play role in growing mushrooms



by Daniel Cavazos
Veg Pro International

Who would have thought mushrooms were such a complex crop to grow? With so many challenges facing the industry, Monterey Mushrooms of Watsonville has perfected the art of producing quality mushrooms.

Quality Assurance Manager Matt Fuller made our visit a treat. With his wit and passion for mushrooms, there was never a dull moment in our tour. With its huge market share – 43 percent -- Monterey Mushrooms has 10 strategically placed operations throughout the United States. It can accommodate demand from anywhere in the nation, consistently producing more than 120,000 pounds of mushrooms daily.

There are three phases to producing a mushroom crop: composting, pasteurization and fruiting. Science and chemistry play a major role in developing ideal growing material conditions. Proper management of the compost and pasteurization to rid it of any pathogens are very important. Once the compost is ready and has been seeded, the “spawn run” begins. Spawn runs are spiderweb-like organisms that indicate the mushroom seed is working. Once the spawn runs are complete, the material is taken out of those rooms, placed in 8- by 4-foot wooden trays and stored in a climate-controlled grow house. Then fresh air is extracted from the grow house to stimulate mushrooms to reproduce.

“The key to growing mushrooms is not sunlight or nutrition elements. It’s the precise control of oxygen and CO2 components that make a mushroom reproduce,” Fuller said. Once mushrooms detect a lack of oxygen, they naturally reproduce by sending a pin up into the compost, which

becomes the mushroom itself. Once that happens, fresh air is let back in to control the size of the mushrooms to meet market demands. Harvest is done in three five-day breaks. Then the crop is terminated and the process begins again.

Monterey Mushrooms was a delightful experience. We left the facility with a fresh appreciation for the mushroom industry.

Impressive services for moving produce



by Clayton Norman
DuPont Crop Protection

At the end of our first day in California, Class 3 met with Rob Lynch at C.H. Robinson. Everyone was impressed with the class and professionalism that this host put on for our group. Rob gave us a

thorough presentation explaining the inner workings of this large third-party logistics provider.

Founded in 1905, C.H. Robinson provides freight transportation logistics, outsourced solutions and produce sourcing in and around the world to their customers. Rob explained the program C.H. Robinson offers associations such as FFVA, Western Growers Association and the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association. It allows members of these organizations to use C.H. Robinson’s services to get their product to a shelf near you. Currently 10 associations, 350+ shippers, and 150,000+ produce shipments are involved.

I was blown away by the technology involved in some of the services, such as the ability to track temperatures for a shipment from pickup to delivery. The systems they have are incredible! They also offer timely reports of fuel pricing and trucking shortages. In my view, C.H. Robinson has the ability to do almost anything when it comes to getting a grower’s product from Point A to Point B.



The tour rose to new heights when Cathy Atchley (left), Matt Stacey and Jamie Lang checked out the beds at Monterey Mushroom.



Ocean Mist Farms: Go big or go home



by Ryan Atwood
KeyPlex

Ocean Mist Farms just turned 90 years old. It is a multigenerational family business founded in 1924. Ocean Mist is known for its artichokes, but it grows many different products on about 25,000 acres. The company produces about 45 percent of the fresh artichokes in the marketplace, as well as spinach, lettuce, broccoli, celery and cauliflower.

Ocean Mist's packing facility in Castroville is impressive in size and organization. "Go big or go home" should be the motto. The facility includes 25 bays for loading tractor trailers and uses 12-pallet forklifts to move produce. The company uses ice injection cooling facilities and hydro vacuum coolers, and has dry produce. The cold storage room is coded by location, and forklift drivers use computers to locate pallets for orders using a first-in, first-out system. If produce is not shipped within six days, it is donated to regional food banks.

Food safety is top priority through all steps of Ocean Mist's operations. Growing near the coast allows for the same temperature profiles for most of the growing season, where daytime temperatures never get above 70 degrees. The number one challenge to its business is labor. Recently, the company has begun using the H-2A guest-worker program. Water issues were discussed; however, in the Salinas Valley growers use a reclaimed water system, which has helped lessen the impact of the drought.

Roadside delights



by Elton Baldy
Bayer CropScience

You've heard the expression: "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." On our recent tour in California we had the pleasure to visit an agro-tourism farm in Watsonville -- Gizdich Ranch -- and there wasn't a doctor in sight! That's because this quaint operation grows a diverse array of apples (more than 15 varieties) and produces top-shelf pies, juices and jams, along with berries and pumpkins. The operation was small in acreage but a big experience. The operation included juicing tours of its apple and olallie berries, a gift shop and restaurant, field tours, U-pick fruit and a children's playground. The real take-home message I heard from the owners was "customer service" and "finding your niche."

Owner Vince Gizdich indicated that people from all around the area have a desire to connect to their childhood memories of farming, and his business offers that experience. Our group stopped in for lunch and a tour. The highlight was definitely the dessert. The ranch offered several sweet treats, including homemade pies with fruit grown on the farm. The positive story the farm tells of surviving on a small scale in a big agricultural area is a great message. The farm was extremely busy during our stop.

I believe as an industry we can see value in the efforts taking place at Gizdich Ranch. We must tell our story of what we do in the business, invite consumers to visit our farms and allow interaction and exposure to young people to production agriculture. This was a great experience and a valuable tour.

Vertical integration at Church Brothers



by Sam Glucksman
Glades Crop Care

Founded in 1999, Church Brothers is a leader in the produce industry located in Salinas Valley. Tom and Steve Church strive to maintain the spirit of a family-owned business while providing fresh, quality produce. Church Brothers grows several crops, including lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, green leaf, romaine, celery, green onions, and value-added products such as spring mix.

The vertically integrated company considers itself to be "a one-stop shop," doing its own shipping, transportation, processing and packaging, quality control, customer service and food safety. Like some other companies, every year Church Brothers breaks down its entire operation piece-by-piece and transports it on more than 100 trucks to Yuma, Ariz., for the winter season. There, it is reassembled -- all in 48 hours!

Megan Chedwick, director of food safety, is a member of the Western Growers Association leadership class that joined us on our Belle Glade tour in January. Along with Raul Mendez and Louis Huerta, she was gracious enough to give Class 3 a tour of Church Brothers' operation. We observed a crew harvesting lettuce, and Megan explained the many challenges of her food safety role. "More than anything, like the rest of our leadership groups, I have a passion for the industry and learning as much as possible so I can contribute to the next generation of leaders," she said.



Grapes at Bianchi Vineyard in Soledad at the foot of the Santa Lucia Highland Mountains are grown for Estancia Estates wines.

United we stand: Divided we fail



by Elton Baldy
Bayer CropScience

On our final day in California, we met with representatives of the United Fresh Produce Association to discuss their role in the produce industry. Jeff Oberman, vice president of trade relations, gave a great overview of United's efforts on behalf of producer and industry partners. From Washington, D.C., to the trade show floor, United Fresh brings the industry together on issues such as trade, labor and the

environment. This was a great discussion on the much-needed efforts from a trade organization. Collaboration has been a proven recipe for success for our industry over the years, which we discussed. Early labor issues in California, food safety across the United States, and political influence in Washington were all topics covered in our meeting. He also discussed United Fresh's initiative to put salad bars in school cafeterias. This program exposes school children to the value of fresh produce in their diets. These are proactive steps to better our society's diet and increase the demand for our business.

In addition, we gained insight from Jim Bogart, president of the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California. This was a very informative discussion on the financial impact and the diversity of crops grown in the three-county region of the central coast. From artichokes to spinach, this

region provides a powerful economic base for the community. Bogart talked about the service the group provides to growers in the political arena, education, and proactive compliance work.

He also shared the results of a recent member survey that showed the top concerns are labor, water/quality, food safety, crop protection and regulations. Early on when Bogart joined the association the primary need was labor reform; today, the needs have become much more complex. This example of hundreds of growers working together is what agriculture needs to solve tough issues that we face in these challenging times.



Taylor Farms: Salad on a massive scale



by Jeff Goodale
Duda Farm Fresh Foods

One of the fastest-growing companies in the Salinas Valley, Taylor Farms was founded by Bruce Taylor in 1995 with the objective of becoming America's favorite salad maker. Although Taylor is a relatively young company by Salinas standards, it has become an extremely important player. The company operates in 11 U.S. cities and has one facility in Mexico. Traditionally, a large portion of Taylor's business was for the foodservice industry, but in recent years it has seen tremendous growth in its packaged salad business.

Our hosts were Michelle Story and Kelley Lopez. Story heads up a team dedicated to servicing large retail customers such as Walmart. They discussed the intricacies of working with such large retailers. Story explained that sometimes it can be difficult when a large customer wants to make major changes because of the ripple effects through the company's supply chain. However, a factor in Taylor Farm's success has been Bruce Taylor's passion for servicing his customers and his willingness to try new items and opportunities, she said.

In fact, the company has been approved to handle meat and is cooking chicken and pasta in a few locations – examples of the customer coming to Taylor to see if it could help meet a need, Story said. Other companies, including Starbucks and the convenience store chain WaWa, have reached out to Taylor for increased business because it is willing to try things other shippers are hesitant to try. Story also noted that another major asset is the company's willingness to seek out talented employees.

Our group toured the packaged salad facility, an extremely organized and efficiently run operation with 18 packing lines and 36 bagging machines. The class also had the chance to see six new robotic packing machines. Initially, Lopez said, the team was worried the robots would not

be able to keep up with product, but they are so fast they actually have to wait on product. The robots have proven so effective that Taylor will be rolling them out to all applicable packing lines.



Jason Melvin of Constellation Brands discusses technology along with traditional grape-growing techniques at Bianchi Vineyard.



Wine galore: Bianchi Vineyard



by Daniel Cavazos
Veg Pro International

The last stop of our California tour took us to Constellation Brands' Bianchi Vineyard in Soledad, where Director of Vineyard Operations Jason Melvin provided us with an informative tour. Constellation Brands is a publicly held company that produces, imports, exports, markets and sells alcoholic beverages, with more than 100 brands in 100 countries worldwide. It produces more than 57 million cases of wine, 7 million cases of spirits and 170 million cases of beer. Constellation Brands is the number one multi-category (wine, spirits and beer) company in the United States.

The Monterey wine industry comprises more than 45,000 acres, with Constellation being about 6,000 acres. Of the 172,000 tons of wine processed in Monterey, Constellation accounts for more than 90,000 tons. Wine grapes contribute \$214 million to the Monterey economy. Primary varieties are chardonnay, pinot noir, merlot, cabernet sauvignon and Riesling.

As director of vineyard operations, Melvin is directly involved with pest control, irrigation, nutrition and viticulture. One of his biggest challenges is being sustainable from an economic and environmental standpoint. The company's size makes it a target, he said. Strict regulations mean that Melvin maximizes efficiency by conserving water and being tactical with pesticide applications. "Sharing resources such as water, electricity and only using what we need and no more are key aspects of being a sustainable operation," he explained. Farming the property so it will be available for use by future generations is very important for the company.

Although a taste test was not readily available at the vineyard, Melvin surprised Class 3 by treating us to six bottles of Estancia wine at our dinner that night. This generous gesture brought a celebratory end to a very eye-opening California tour experience.



Miles of sweet production



by Jamie Lang
PNC Bank

Growing up in Central Florida less than 40 minutes away from what I believed was the strawberry capital of the world, I was raised on fresh strawberries from the area around Plant City.

I admit that I was surprised that Florida contributes less 10 percent of strawberry production in the United States and very impressed with the thousands of acres filled with huge red, sweet berries that were tucked away in the valley between the mountains more than 2,800 miles away from Plant City.

California's coastal rich sandy soil and temperate weather extends the strawberry growing season. Although Florida's production time is essentially half that of California's, expenses are about the same per acre.

Cal Giant's leadership has resulted in sustainability with all growers and trading partners. The operation began shipping in 1970 and has since become vertically integrated from growing to shipping around the world. Cindy Jewell, director of marketing, and J.T. Tipton, the field supervisor, allowed our class to view production during harvest and gave us a tour of the cooling facility.

The company has great success promoting its products, including strawberries, blueberries, blackberries and raspberries. Most recently, orders have included shipping green berries to China.

Our experience from this educational trip was profound and encourages me to educate consumers on the differences in production between the two states, to always support U.S. farmers by buying Fresh From Florida produce when available, and to rely on our Western growers when Florida crops are not in season.

Standing tall in the celery fields



by Cathy Atchley
On Point Ag

Midmorning of day three reminded us of home. We met with a company that we were all familiar with from Florida. One of our ELDP Class 3 members even works for it: Duda Farm Fresh Foods.

We started by visiting Duda's celery operation in Salinas. There we met Manny Alcalá, Steve Bocchino, and Steve's daughter Melanie. Alcalá talked us through the growing details and discussed the competitive advantages of their proprietary breeding program. Bocchino, headquartered in Oviedo, knew several of our class members. Melanie was gaining experience by rotating through different areas of the company.

In the grocery store you can find Duda celery under the Dandy label. Look for sleeved stalks or cut hearts -- we saw both in the field. To take this product from a sleeved stalk to a value-added product (cut hearts and sticks), every inch of stalk height matters, along with variety, management and other factors. Thanks to the company's research and development, and through the efforts of Dr. Larry Pierce, Duda has been able to patent proprietary varieties. Standard crop height is around 18 inches, but Duda is able to grow a crop of up to 30 inches at the joint. In doing so, it has the ability to collect multiple cuts from a stalk. For example, Duda's fresh cut facility can get two 8-inch cuts versus the standard one cut.

Before ending our Duda visit, we also toured its research facility. We learned about the selection process for desirable traits (flavor, texture, nutrition, appearance, growing strength), and plant breeding methods. We also saw some of the items that may soon be available in a store (or Bloody Mary) near you.

*The class' next stop will be
FFVA 2014, where
members will complete the
program and graduate.*

ELDP ALUMNI

... updates from Class 1 & 2



April Roe Porter

Congratulations to April Roe Porter and husband Kyle on the birth of baby girl Brooklyn Jane Porter on July 19. Brooklyn weighed in at 9 lbs. 5 oz. and measured 22 inches.



Tom Mitchell

New Florida Citrus Mutual board member Tom Mitchell (center, seated) prepares to participate in his first FCM board meeting. (pictured left)



Ian Bessell and Amber Kosinsky

Ian Bessell and Amber Kosinsky were recently chosen as part of Produce Business Magazine's 40-Under-Forty.

Rob Atchley

Rob Atchley recently addressed the Florida Citrus Mutual conference with his presentation on "Investing in Florida Citrus". (pictured left, photo courtesy of Ron O'Connor)