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THE PACKER

Deardorff name change signifies turn to organic

By John Chadwell, Staff Writer



A new generation is at the helm of Oxnard, California-based Deardorff-Jackson Co., and big changes are on the horizon.

First, there's a new name, Deardorff Family Farms, announced in a Sept. 15 news release. There's also a new slogan: "Sustainable Farming for a Healthier Life."

Another is the redesign of its labels to better reflect the company's shift to more organic farming.

The company was established in 1937 in Los Angeles County.

"My great grandfather and G.B. Jackson joined forces in 1944. They marketed crops in L.A. County," said Scott Deardorff, company secretary. "In 1962, we got into farming in Oxnard County."

Today, Deardorff said the company ships 3 million to 4 million flats or crates of produce each year.

Deardorff said that even though Jackson had not been a part of the company for many years, the company name was well established, so no need was seen for a name change, but now the fourth-generation Deardorffs are reinventing the company.

"We want to refresh our image and tell our story and philosophy about farming. That story has never been told," he said. "We're going to have new brochures and a Web site debut in the next couple weeks, and at PMA (Fresh Summit) it will all be available."

Deardorff said the change is all about redefining, "who we are and what we do." He said that farming has changed since his great grandfather started the business and, "...we're much more environmentally and socially aware, and we're making changes to the company to reflect that." He said the company is developing an entire line of organic produce.

"The first one that we're going to start marketing around the first of December is celery," he said. "Then in the spring or early summer, we'll have tomatoes."

He said it was difficult to tell how many products will eventually be offered.

"We're learning as we go as far as using cover crops, so we're thinking of a number of things for our lineup," he said.

"We're transitioning one ranch (to organic), which takes three years to be certified," he said. "We also signed a lease on a small ranch that we're in the process of certifying in another two or three weeks."

Deardorff said the company will probably switch to 50% organic products in three to five years. He said all of the farm's products will be grown in a sustainable manner.

"Everything we grow should not affect what we're going to do years from now," he said. "We go by that philosophy. We go by a 'soft-farming' philosophy where you use either organic or soft materials as a first resort before we rely on chemicals."

The organic and pesticide-free produce to be shipped in November under the new Deardorff Family Farms' Sir William label are celery, romaine, cabbage and other mixed vegetables. The redesigned Highland Ranch label is scheduled to appear on packaging in June.

"We have some designs that are ready to go," he said. "It's a fresher look."

Deardorff Family Farms can be contacted online at www.DeardorffFamilyFams.com or 805/487-7801.