



A load of broccoli was being unloaded this morning at the Norcal Frozen Foods plant.

Kurt Ellison

Employees on the job at Norcal

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Norcal Frozen Foods began its first full day of operation under sunny skies this morning.

Workers — who had ended an 18-month labor strike last week — returned to process spinach and broccoli.

Vehicles took up every available space along Ford Street, which borders the plant, and former strikers, some carrying bag lunches, filed into work about 8 a.m.

Not all of the thousand or so former strikers are to be called back right away, plant owners said last week.

David Gill, a King City grower who led a consortium of growers in the takeover of the assets of the now-defunct Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food Co., said it will be about two months before the plant is operating at full production.

Apparently about 250 line workers were back at work today.

The plant looked busy, with forklift operators loading crates of spinach onto conveyor belts and workers darting about the premises.

Several people stood at the company personnel office, a trailer on Ford Street, waiting to submit work applications.

Former strikers are required to fill out applications and will

be called back to work on a seniority basis.

Among those former strikers was Cuca Lomeli, who said simply, "It feels good to be going back to work."

Jose Hernandez, who worked as a forklift driver at Watsonville Canning for 25 years before the strike, was also among those filing an application.

He said he probably wouldn't be called back for a while, at least until production is in full swing.

"I'll take the time off. I sort of got used to being on vacation," he joked.

Plant managers were unavailable for comment, but

their secretaries said everyone was busy getting things back in order.

A secretary for Norcal President Ron Trine said Trine was working in a spinach field and couldn't be reached.

She said it would take about a week before things were back to smooth operation at the plant. "There are a lot of bugs to work out," she said.

Bugs were also being worked out down at the Teamsters union hall on West Lake Avenue. Several job applicants were inside complaining to Teamsters Local 912 leader Sergio Lopez about which workers were being selected to go back to work first.

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