

Big changes afoot at Green Giant plant

By LANE WALLACE
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Pillsbury Inc. announced plans today to shift its Green Giant broccoli and cauliflower packing operation from Watsonville to plants in Mexico and Ohio within the next 12 months.

The company issued a statement this morning saying it has begun studies "to evaluate the future of the plant," but has made no decisions.

But workers at the West Beach Street plant were told this morning by company offi-

cials that there are no plans to close or sell the plant, said Sergio Lopez, head of the Teamsters union in Watsonville.

Michael Schaeffer, company vice president for frozen operations, said the company has "a commitment to stay in Watsonville," said Lopez, who attended the meeting.

Schaeffer said the company plans some other type of food processing, Lopez said, but wouldn't reveal now what it would be. Company officials said

they're not planning any major cuts in the work force, now at 555, Lopez said.

The Watsonville plant is used strictly for packing Pillsbury-Green Giant products, such as "boil in a bag" vegetable mixes.

Rumors about the plant's future have been going around Watsonville for several years, Lopez said.

"We thought it might be the worst of our fears," that the plant might shut down, he said.

Lopez said he's pleased to hear that the company plans to stay, but is disappointed to see some of the processing go to Mexico.

"It's kind of a cliff-hanger," he said, because the company hasn't announced specific plans.

Line workers at Pillsbury-Green Giant make \$7.56 an hour, \$1.31 more than workers at Watsonville's other two vegetable processors, Richard A. Shaw Inc. and Norcal-Crosetti Foods Inc. Lopez said the Green Giant workers are paid more because some specialized skills are required at the plant.

Pillsbury is a subsidiary of Grand Metropolitan PLC, an international food, drink and retailing company.