

# Sale of Green Giant plant 'a win' for Watsonville

By GREG BEEBE  
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WATSONVILLE — The sale of the Pillsbury/Green Giant plant to a long-time cider bottler bodes well for long-term economic growth here, city officials said Friday.

Although Thursday's sale of the \$8-million Green Giant plant to S. Martinelli & Co. means an estimated 220 workers at the plant won't be rehired by a replacement food packer, City Manager Steve Salomon said the Martinelli takeover "has the potential to be a major component of the city's employ-

ment base. ...

"The thing that is a disappointment is that there doesn't appear to be a way to save the jobs that are there right now," Salomon said.

"There's clearly a win here for the city. There's probably a loss as well," he said. "I suspect there might have been, under any circumstances, a win and a loss and I think the win is much bigger than the loss."

Martinelli officials say the new home solves space problems at the 125-year-old company's present production facility on

East Beach Street. The 263,000 square foot Green Giant plant will provide plenty of space for warehousing; presently, Martinelli leases 13 warehouses scattered around the Pajaro Valley.

"This will allow us to consolidate our warehousing and shipping operations under one roof," said company Vice President and General Manager John Martinelli.

The Martinelli Co. had hinted that it might be forced to leave Watsonville if it could not expand; the company also bought a six-acre plot of land on Kearney Street —

in the city's industrial area — and was preparing construction plans when the Green Giant deal presented itself.

The company will put the Kearney Street parcels on the market and move its warehousing operations to the Green Giant plant beginning in the spring.

As that space becomes available, Salomon said it could open the door for more employers to come to the Pajaro Valley.

Carl Blanke, the commercial real-estate agent who brokered the Green Giant pur-

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chase, said the Kearney Street property could be a "grand opportunity for another new business and a new employer for the city of Watsonville."

Salomon said, "Our hope would be that will (turn into) a job center."

Eventually, the Martinelli Co.'s two-acre East Beach Street production facility could also become available.

"We of course would like to see it stay in a commercial-industrial capacity as opposed to converting it to some other use," said Martinelli. "There will be some in-

terest in the property from a housing perspective. ... But what Watsonville still needs more than housing is jobs."

The Martinelli Co. presently employs 165 people, but down the road, the company may delve into contract bottling opportunities that could mean more jobs for the city, said Martinelli.

"If there is going to be a job gain with the Martinelli purchase, it won't be immediate," said Sergio Lopez, secretary-treasurer of Teamsters Union Local 912, which represents Green Giant workers who will lose their jobs Jan. 14.

Although county officials are

formulating a retraining program — funded by state and federal grants and \$200,000 from Pillsbury — Lopez is not optimistic about the chances of the workers finding jobs "in the real world."

The average Green Giant worker is a 48-year-old woman with limited job and English-speaking skills, he said.

"Certainly, in the short term the big disappointment is the loss of those particular jobs," said Salomon. "We're going to do our best to work with the county and the state to try to keep the pressure on Pillsbury to make sure those folks get the best treatment possible."