

Two food plants reach agreement

By ELIZABETH SCHILLING
STAFF WRITER

Two of Watsonville's seven major food-processing plants have reached tentative agreement on a new contract with the Teamsters union. Negotiators for J.J. Crosetti Co. and J.M. Smucker Co. and the Teamsters agreed yesterday on a contract which, union officials said, "makes no significant change from the old contract."

The 700-plus employees at the two plants have been working during this peak fall season on an extension of the old contract, as have the employees at Pillsbury/Green Giant, Del Mar Food Products and New West Foods, while 1,700 workers at Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food Co. and Richard A. Shaw Inc. have been on strike.

Unionized employees at Crosetti and Smucker will vote on the contract offer Monday at 9 a.m. at the Veterans Memorial Hall on East Beach Street. The offer carries the recommendation of union officials.

Neither company nor Teamsters representatives would reveal details of the agreement except to say the contract will be good for one year, rather than the usual three years, and will not affect current wages.

Crosetti and Smucker came to the agreement as part of the Frozen Food Employers Assn., a group that also includes frozen food plants in Patterson and Oxnard.

New West Foods, which employs about 200 people at its Walker Street plant, had been part of the alliance, but withdrew earlier this week.

Similarly, Del Mar withdrew from the association last month and has been negotiating independently. According to union officials, negotiations have been "progressing" with Del Mar.

Green Giant is also negotiating independently.

All contracts in the frozen-food industry throughout the state expired June 30. Most plants have continued operating under extensions.

Leon Ellis, business agent for Teamsters Local 912 in Watsonville, said the agreement reflects a spirit of compromise among all parties involved in yesterday's negotiations, which were conducted at the Seaclyff Inn in Aptos.

He said that along with the different opinions of managers from four companies there were also competing interests of the two other Teamsters locals — one in Oxnard, the other in Patterson — to be resolved.

"At one point Ruth Carpenter, the federal mediator working with us, followed a person to their car and pulled them back into the room in order to keep the talks going," said Ellis. "She's tough, but at least we got a settlement."

Unionized employees at Patterson Frozen Foods and Oxnard Frozen Foods, both independent cooperative plants, will vote on the offer next week. Workers at all four plants must agree to the offer in order for it to be ratified.

Ellis said the tentative agreement with the association "establishes guidelines" for the stalled negotiations with Shaw and Watsonville Canning.

"The tentative agreement gives them an indication of where we are coming from and the standards of the other companies," he said.

Steve Shaw, vice president of Shaw's, said the agreement will not affect his negotiations "in the least."

"We are negotiating independently because our problems are unique to our company," he said. Crosetti, he