

Norcal-Crosetti plant to close

Watsonville - 1990 More layoffs face Watsonville workers

By LANE WALLACE
STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — The Dean Foods frozen-vegetable company will stop production Feb. 10 at the Norcal Crosetti plant it bought this summer, forcing an undetermined number of layoffs.

Dean Foods' vegetable division, based in Green Bay, Wis., will also close its Salinas plant, in January. The Dean plant on Riverside Drive in Watsonville will remain open and pick up some workers from the other two plants.

There will be new jobs at the Riverside Drive plant, and company president Jeff Shaw said the company will work with the Teamsters Union to rehire as many of the existing Norcal employees as possible. As many as 800 people work at the Norcal Crosetti plant during the peak season. About the same number work at the Dean Foods plant.

The closures are another step in a long decline from the days when Watsonville was the "frozen food capital of the world" in the early '80s. Then, there were four frozen-

vegetable companies and four plants; after the Norcal Crosetti plant closes there will be one plant and one company, Dean Foods.

"We are very sensitive to the impact of these closings on the cities of Watsonville and Salinas," said Jeff Shaw in a prepared statement.

"However, we have concluded that one, large financially strong and stable plant in Watsonville is in everyone's best long term-interest," Shaw said. "The majority of Norcal's remaining volume will stay in Watsonville" at the Dean plant on Riverside Drive.

The Norcal Crosetti plant, at Walker and Ford streets, is not closing entirely. The frozen-food warehouse and repacking operation will remain open indefinitely, Shaw said.

The closure "is going to hit hard," said Mayor Tony Campos, not only at the workers but the city's economy.

"It's another step backward for some of our workers," Campos said. For those who have worked in the



Graciela Chavez, an employee at Norcal Crosetti, wonders what the future holds for her after hearing the news that Dean Foods will close the plant at Ford and Walker streets in February.

Michael McCollum

Workers greet news with shock, sadness

By EMILIO ALVARADO
STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — Yesterday's announcement that the Norcal Crosetti plant was going to close in February came as shock to employees.

"It was a big surprise," said Virginia Perez, of Castroville, who started working at the plant a month ago. "There was a lot of sadness."

Employees said they were told about the news yesterday when managers gathered them in a group. Managers were short, also curt, and offered little details about the closing, referring workers to union officials for further information. The news left some dazed.

For Perez, the news was somewhat of a shock, but will have little effort on her since she has only been working there for a month, she said. She feels sadness, however, for those that have been working there for years and are dependent on the job.

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frozen-food plant for 15 or 20 years, "it's not easy" to go into another job.

Camos said the city will do what it can to help get training for the workers and to get another company in the Norcal Crosetti plant.

Dean Foods is exploring several options for the Norcal plant, Shaw said, and hopes to find a new owner. "The plant is highly suitable for other types of frozen and refrigerated food processing," he said.

Norcal Crosetti was admittedly in financial difficulty when it sold to Dean Foods in August. Norcal was formed when Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food Co. went bankrupt at the end of an 18-month strike by workers in 1987. Norcal took over the Watsonville Canning plant and merged with Crosetti Frozen Food Co. a year later.

In the late '80s, Dean Foods, the third largest frozen- and canned-food processor in the country, bought the Richard A. Shaw company on Riverside Drive. Jeff Shaw is a son of company founder Dick Shaw.

Chuck Allen, executive coordi-

nator of the Watsonville Food Processors Association, said "there's always a chance" another vegetable company or a fruit packer would be interested in the Norcal plant.

"I still believe Watsonville offers significant benefits" to the industry, Allen said. "The strawberry industry is stronger than ever."

After Pillsbury Green Giant closed its Watsonville plant four years ago and moved to Mexico, the Martinelli cider company bought it.

Officials of the local Teamsters Union were at a conference this week and couldn't be reached for comment. The Teamsters represent non-management workers at the Dean and Norcal Crosetti plants.

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"It's sad, but I have hope," Perez said.

The announcement of the plant closing left Perez a little perplexed.

"Agriculture isn't going anywhere, so why is the plant closing?" said Perez, who had worked at the plant for seven years some time ago.

Some workers, who did not want to be named, were critical of the company and said they saw the plant's closure coming. One worker said it's typical of business today.

"They put money and profit before people," she said. "They say they care about us, but their actions say something very different."

Graciela Chavez missed work yesterday, because she went to see a physician. She returned to the plant in the afternoon to hand in note from her doctor to the company as proof that she had in fact gone to her appointment. She missed hearing the news, but she found out just before getting in her car and driving off.

Chavez, who started working at the plant about a month ago, said she was shocked to hear the plant was closing. She looked over at the plant behind her and said, "I guess I better start looking for another job."