

# Watsonville Canning keeps growing

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Watsonville Canning and Frozen Foods, which has grown considerably in the last 10 years, has in the last year expanded more: There's a new broccoli plant, new workers, new offices and new corporate entities.

Smiley Verduzco, executive vice-president of Conco Corp., Watsonville Canning's recently formed holding company, said the company is now the country's leading producer of frozen broccoli, packing 90 million of the 300 million pounds turned out annually in the U.S.

It packs 150 million total pounds of vegetables annually, which ranks it among the largest frozen vegetable packers in the state.

It is also one of the largest employers in the county, with 2,300 people on the payroll at the peak of the packing season.

All this growth, from \$15 million worth of sales to \$140 million in 10 years, was enough to spur the company in March to form two new corporate entities.

Conco Corp. (named for owner Mort Console) is now the holding company for both Watsonville Canning and another newly formed company, Console Foods Corporation. "Conco Corp. was formed to handle the company's growth and diversity," Verduzco said.

Console Foods will come up with new product lines and market them, with increasing emphasis on foreign markets.

Now, foods processed at the Watsonville plant are sold to Japan, Australia, Europe, the Mideast and Puerto Rico.

The recent addition of another broccoli line to the existing 35 acres of buildings in Watsonville, has increased the payroll by another 125 people.

With the growth and the new companies has come a move of the corporate headquarters from the plant on Ford Street to a plush 12,000 square-foot office behind the Green Valley Athletic Club, off Green Valley Road.

There, the company's computer network, accounting offices and Console Foods and Conco Corp. are housed. The food processing plant remains on Ford Street.



Slicers cut stalks of broccoli prior to packing at the new broccoli line.

Watsonville Canning has opened a new office in Atlanta, and in the near future plans to add several new product lines.

Console plans to continue the rate of growth, Verduzco said.

Part of the company's success, said Verduzco, is the company's location. Almost all the produce is grown within a 100-mile radius of Watsonville and an inexpensive but loyal labor force is available.

(When Watsonville Canning negotiated a contract with teamsters union local 912 last year, it

ended up paying union workers less than those in other plants, although historically, one industry-wide contract covered all Teamster employees of the members of the Watsonville Frozen Food Employers Association.)

Verduzco also pointed to the expertise of the top management. Every executive has spent time in the field, and each head of each department knows something of everyone else's job, he said.

"We're kind of unique. Many of our competitors don't have the coordination of information between departments," Verduzco said.