

VCF Watsonville General 1980 - R/P 4/30/90

# Green Giant announces layoffs in Watsonville

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Pillsbury-Green Giant employees learned in a two-hour meeting this morning that by January the work force at the plant will be whittled down by more than two-thirds, to 150 full-time employees, as the plant shifts to computerized production of mainly spinach and Brussels sprouts.

Currently, the vegetable-processing plant employs 520

people — 370 full-time workers and 150 seasonal workers — a press release from Pillsbury's corporate headquarters said.

The company added that it will be setting up an extensive job search assistance office, to help laid-off employees with job counseling, personal counseling, training and education as well as other services to ease the transition.

The company said the cutback

is part of a \$3.4 million upgrade of the plant. Today is the first time the company has made any specific announcements about its plans for the Watsonville plant. The parent company, Grand Metropolitan in London, announced in January that it would close some U.S. plants and upgrade and streamline others as part of a \$140 million modernization project.

Grand Met, however, had an-

nounced that it would move its broccoli and cauliflower production — a mainstay in Watsonville — to Mexico by the end of the year. It had not announced before today what products, if any, would take their place.

"The planned investment will make Watsonville the packager for select Green Giant frozen vegetables sold on the West Coast, as well as the prime packer for certain spinach and

Brussels sprout products for the entire U.S.," the press release said.

At press time, Green Giant employees were still in a meeting at the plant, and security guards had been hired to ensure that no members of the press enter the property. A woman leaving the plant, however, said the work force would be cut back to 125 people.

"We are very sad," she said in

Spanish. "It will be very small."

Another woman was seen walking out of the meeting with a handkerchief covering her face.

Mayor Todd McFarren and Councilman Paul Milladin were briefed on the changes before the company met with employees. Neither would comment as they left the plant, but Milladin expressed concern that the city

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would need to attract some new businesses and find new ways of getting revenues into the city coffers.

Teamsters union Local 912 officials attended the meeting at the plant, and had scheduled a meeting of their own with Green Giant employees for later this morning.