

Del Mar decides to bargain alone

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Del Mar Food Products Corp. announced today that it will break with an alliance of frozen-food employers and attempt to negotiate its own contract with local Teamsters.

Del Mar, which mostly processes fruit and green peppers, has been in operation while Teamsters have been attempting to close down operations at Richard A. Shaw Frozen Food and Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food Co.

In other developments in the eight-day-old strike, union official said they would go to court this afternoon to seek relief from a restraining order which they feel favors Watsonville Canning in the company's attempt to limit pickets.

The temporary restraining order issued last Tuesday limits the number of pickets to four at each of the company's eight gates.

A maneuver by Watsonville Canning to further limit the number of pickets at its Ford Street plant was evident at the plant this morning. At several points around the plant, shiny, new chain-link fencing had been installed and reinforced with rows of wooden produce boxes in front of areas that had previously been gates or open areas — effectively removing the gates.

"Watsonville Canning is trying to get all the pickets out of sight so that when they bring in scabs the new people won't know there is even a strike going on," said Sergio Lopez, a business agent with Teamsters Local 912.

Watsonville police have been enforcing the temporary

restraining order strictly, making dozens of visits to the Ford Street plant each day.

Lopez complained that enforcement was too strict because pickets are not allowed to inform people entering the gates about why they are on strike.

Teamsters officials were also not available for comment about Del Mar's withdrawal from the Frozen Food Employers Assn., a group of company owners that has negotiated contracts as a single unit since the 1960s.

"I have supported the group for more than 24 years," said Charles Buchwald, president of Del Mar, "but since Watsonville Canning withdrew three years ago and Shaw's and Green Giant withdrew this year, it is no longer to our advantage to stay with the group."

The companies that remain in the the association are J.J. Crosetti Frozen Foods, J.M. Smucker and New West.

Buchwald said most of the 600-plus workers at his West Beach Street plant work under a Teamster contract that covers apple workers, but a minority fall into the frozen-food worker category.

The Teamster contract covering apple workers expired on June 30th, as did the contract covering Watsonville's 6,000-plus frozen-food plant workers.

Buchwald said no meeting has been set with the Teamsters to begin separate negotiations.

Union officials said yesterday that they expect to meet with Shaw and the association late this week.