

# County gets \$50,000 state grant to study ailing frozen-food industry

The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors has received a \$50,000 grant from the state Department of Commerce for a study of the food processing industry and resources for retraining workers if the industry moves.

The board voted to apply for the "sudden and severe economic dislocation grant" in mid-February. At its meeting next week, it will vote on accepting the funds.

The money will be used to hire an independent consultant to complete a comprehensive market analysis of the frozen vegetable and fruit processing and cold storage industries.

The consultant will then develop an "action plan" to help employers and workers facing plant closures and layoffs. The plan will outline the federal, state and local resources available to them.

While no local frozen-food plants have announced upcoming closures, several have merged or been bought up by larger companies over the last decade. While the industry employed 7,000 people at peak seasons in

1979, the Teamsters Union Local 912 estimates, it employs a high of 4,000 now.

The blame has been laid in various places, from increased automation to the growing com-

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The parent company of Watsonville's Pillsbury-Green

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petitive pressure from plants in Mexico.

The Bush Administration is reportedly mulling over a plan to lift the current 17.5 percent tariffs on imported frozen foods. Executives in the California frozen-food companies have warned that they can't compete in the market without the tariffs in place, because plants in Mexico are able to operate much more cheaply.

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Giant plant, Grand Metropolitan in London, announced earlier this year that it will be moving its broccoli and cauliflower production to Mexico. It has not yet announced what will replace it here.

The Watsonville City Council and the Monterey Board of Supervisors have both voted to oppose the lifting of the tariffs. A Congressional committee will begin studying the matter in May.