

# Watsonville's wilting frozen food industry

## Boycott of Pillsbury, Green Giant sought

By Lee Quarnstrom  
Mercury News Staff Writer

A nationwide boycott of all Pillsbury and Green Giant foods, Häagen-Dazs ice cream and Burger King fast food will be announced today by workers laid off from the Green Giant frozen food plant in Watsonville.

Upset at losing their jobs to Mexico, former workers at the Watsonville facility will launch the boycott against their former employer and its British parent firm, Grand Metropolitan PLC.

"We are going to reach out to every union hall in the country, to every church group in the country, to every environmental group in the country," boycott coordinator Mike Kostyal said Wednesday. "We are going to tell them this is a campaign for jobs, for justice and for the environment."

Kostyal said that Green Giant has so far laid off 380 workers from its Watsonville frozen-food packing plant, but a company spokesman said it had laid off 270 workers.

Kostyal said the bulk of the work was transferred to the company's facility in Irapuato, in central Mexico. While Watsonville workers were paid \$7.61 an hour plus medical and retirement benefits, he said, employees at the Mexican plant make \$4 a day.

A Pillsbury spokesman at company headquarters in Minneapolis said he had no argument with Kostyal's salary figures. He called Green Giant's wages "competitive and then some" for Mexican workers.

However, said Terry Thompson, in the Green Giant layoffs there were "as many jobs going to Ohio as to Mexico." The company also owns Häagen-Dazs ice cream and Burger King.

He said the company plans to keep the Watsonville facility open and has a \$3.4 million modernization program under way there.

The members of Kostyal's group, Trabajadores del Desplazados, which translates to Displaced Workers, want their jobs

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## City backs attempt to slow Mexico free trade

By Bob Johnson  
Special to the Mercury News

The Watsonville City Council has unanimously approved a resolution objecting to quickly establishing free trade between the United States and Mexico.

Vice Mayor Oscar Rios brought the issue to the council, along with the local Teamsters, who protested the loss of jobs this year as Green Giant shifted production to Mexico. The Teamsters said the layoffs were part of a decade of lost jobs and falling wages as major food processing corporations left for Mexico.

"I'm one of the displaced Green Giant workers who lost their jobs, as did my wife," said Lauro Navarro, who was laid off in January after working for 13 years at the Green Giant plant. "We have children, and we are both in job training. When we finish the retraining, where are we going to work?"

Chavelo Moreno, representing Teamsters Local 912, presented a dismal picture of the prospects for work in Watsonville's

once-flourishing frozen food industry, traditionally the first step beyond the fields for Mexican immigrants on the central coast.

"The city of Watsonville cannot afford to lose any more jobs," he said.

While the fields of the Salinas Valley and the Watsonville area processing plants dominated the U.S. frozen broccoli and cauliflower industry a decade ago, today at least 40 percent of the frozen broccoli and cauliflower eaten in this country is grown and processed in Mexico.

The resolution presented by the Teamsters and endorsed by the city council calls on California's congressional delegation to oppose the Bush administration's attempts to speed free trade with Mexico.

Only Councilwoman Betty Murphy expressed reservations:

"Historically, free trade has been good for consumers and we are all consumers," she said. "But I am going to support this because it is brought to us by the Teamsters."

## Displaced food workers organize boycott

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back, want higher wages and the right to a union for the workers in Irapuato, and want the protection of the environment at Irapuato.

Kostyal said the Mexican frozen-food packing shed, which employs about 800 workers, uses vast amounts of water "while Green Giant employees living nearby have no running potable water in their homes."

Also, said Kostyal, wastewater from the plant is dumped back into the environment without adequate treatment to remove contaminants.

Thompson agreed that "there is some legitimacy" to claims about wastewater treatment at the Irapuato facility.

"I cannot defend all the practices in central Mexico," he said. "But, Pillsbury-Green Giant has one standard worldwide and we adhere to that same health and safety standard for our products in Irapuato as we do in Watsonville."

He said the company has plans "to make certain that any effluent" from the Mexican facility "is totally free of contaminants."

Although he had no comment directly on the boycott, Thompson

said his company and Grand Metropolitan "are not anti-union, not anti-United States."

"Our move was part of a much larger strategic realignment and modernization of our facilities and distribution system."

Also, said the Pillsbury spokesman, laid-off workers in Watsonville were given "unprecedented" severance-pay packages and have been offered help in finding new jobs.

Trabajadores de Desplazados will officially announce its boycott at 11:30 a.m. today at the Green Giant plant in Watsonville.