

Mushroom plant will close by January

SOQUEL — Soquel's most odoriferous landmark — the 33-year-old Castle & Cooke Food mushroom plant — will be closed by the end of January. Development of a high-tech research plant is expected to begin by mid-1985.

To be known as Soquel Research Park, the company plans to create 23 industrial lots, and either sell them or put the buildings up itself.

According to company spokesman Dan Raber of Oceanic California, a real estate development division of the Honolulu-based Castle & Cooke, up to 300,000 square feet of high technology and light industrial buildings could be developed on the 17½-acre site.

The 23 parcels are available for sale, build-to-suit or a joint venture. They range in size from 11,000 to 112,169 square feet.

Raber said the parcels are easily combined to accommodate larger companies. Three parcels, situated on Soquel Drive near the entrance of the park at 41st Avenue, will also be available for commercial or restaurant development.

Oceanic California received site plan approval from the county Board of Supervisors last week. County Senior Civil Engineer Tim Vester said the plan included improvements for drainage, streets, sewer, lighting and grading. Specific plans for any of the 23 lots have yet to be submitted to the county.

Raber maintains, however, that the high-tech research park will break ground by mid-1985. Ruben Franco, manager of the mushroom plant that has been operating there since 1951, told The Sentinel that present plans call for the plant's closure

by the end of January.

One existing 22,000-square-foot building will remain on the site as a mushroom spawning facility. The operation would employ approximately 25 people. The spawnings will be sent to other Castle & Cooke sites in Ventura, Salem, Ore., and Fillmore, Utah.

Franco said the company is still negotiating with the United Farm Workers, which represents most of the plant's 215 employees who will be out of work. It is Castle & Cooke's intention to do what it can for the displaced workers — either at other company operations or with severance pay. Workers have known of company plans for more than two years.

Some 10 million pounds of mushrooms a year are grown at the Soquel plant.