

# Del Mar frozen-fruit firm changing hands

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One of Watsonville's frozen-food processors will soon be under new management.

Charles Buchwald, longtime president of Del Mar Food Products, is relinquishing control of his frozen-food plant on West Beach Street.

The firm will soon be taken over by Wayne Jordan and P.J. Mecozzi, both of whom have worked for Buchwald for several years. Jordan has been a manager at Del Mar, working under general manager John Tipton. Mecozzi works for Joseph Buchwald and Sons in Redwood City, where he mar-

kets products from Del Mar.

Buchwald's Watsonville controlled-atmosphere storage facility on Lee Road isn't part of the deal — it's a separate business — although Buchwald is reportedly planning to sell it as well.

Mecozzi said he, Jordan, and the shareholders have reached agreement on the main points of the plan to change ownership, but it will probably be a few more days before all the signatures are in place. Nine people hold stock in Del Mar; Buchwald and William and David Berelson, who own a food brokerage firm in San Francisco, are the majority stockholders, Mecozzi said.

Mecozzi declined to say how much he and Jordan would be paying for the firm, but said they will "acquire the stock over time based on performance."

Buchwald, who reportedly has been ill, and his partners have owned Del Mar for a long time, are "getting on in years," Mecozzi said, and are ready to give up the business.

"To survive and prosper in today's environment in the frozen-food processing business, it's a full-fledged commitment, and that's what we're bringing to it," Mecozzi said of himself and Jordan.

To the outsider, there will be

little evidence of the change because most of the employees will remain when the new management takes over, Mecozzi said, and the new owners will continue to honor the Teamsters Union contract signed last year.

Del Mar will also continue to pack frozen fruit and peppers, both for institutional and retail sales. They will try to cultivate the market for custom-packed products, Mecozzi said.

Mecozzi, 32, and Jordan, 44, hope to "breathe new life into the company, which has weathered some storms," Mecozzi said.

Those "storms" are the same problems afflicting the entire

frozen-food industry: competition from foreign food packers, high utility costs, and the financial problems in agriculture are among the biggest obstacles.

One of the problems is the perception of agriculture and related businesses in the eye of financial institutions.

"Banks are cautious about what kind of a loan portfolio they may put together for processors," Mecozzi said.

The challenges have been too much for some companies, and over the years, several have folded. But Mecozzi believes there is a real need for frozen foods, so the firms that are

well-managed will prosper.

"Del Mar has had a couple of damaging years, and has been able to perpetuate itself," he said, adding that he is confident things will get better.

Jordan has lived in the area for several years, and Mecozzi plans to move here from Pleasanton. Mecozzi said he has been coming to Watsonville on business for years and is looking forward to living here. With one young son and another child on the way, Mecozzi sees Watsonville as a great place to rear a family.

"It makes the business decision that much easier," he said.