

Industry to 1990



Photo by Diane Varni

Mushroom spawn stood outside the Soquel facility this morning.

Castle and Cooke closing Soquel mushroom plant

Castle and Cooke will close its Soquel mushroom plant by early spring, the firm announced Monday.

The shutdown, which will take place over the next several months, will mean the loss of 215 jobs. Company spokeswoman Debra Bullock said today that the conglomerate will offer the employees jobs in other Castle and Cooke operations or assist them in finding jobs locally.

The employees are represented by the United Farm Workers. UFW spokesman Oscar Medina was unavailable for comment this morning.

The 17-acre plant on Hillcrest Avenue produces about 10 million pounds of mushrooms annually. But two years ago

another Castle and Cooke subsidiary, Oceanic California, got county approval to convert the property into a high-tech industrial park, the proposed Soquel Research Park, with 23 industrially-zoned parcels. Since then, rumors have circulated that the mushroom facility would eventually be closed.

Ms. Bullock, however, said the corporation has no plans at present as to how it will dispose of the property.

Three other company-owned mushroom plants, in Ventura, Salem, Ore., and Fillmore, Utah, are to remain in operation.

Another company spokesman was quoted as saying the Soquel plant "was not meeting our objectives. When we have assets we see can be put to better use, we do it. It is a new management program."

Castle and Cooke received approval from the Board of Supervisors on Nov. 16, 1982, for the research park. County

Planner Mark Demming said the land is now zoned M-1 and C-4, designations that will allow warehousing, light manufacturing and assembly work.

The subdivision approval expires in November, but Demming said he has been told by Castle and Cooke that the firm will soon file the final subdivision map and bond for the improvements, which include construction of access roads to each of the 23 parcels and installation of drainage and sewer systems.

The mushroom spawn plant on Rodeo Gulch Road will remain, Demming confirmed. The other parcels range in size from 11,000 square feet to 112,000 square feet.

"All that we have authorized is division of land and construction of improvements — roads, drainage, sewer system, to serve those lots," Demming said. "Each lot will have separate development plan."

The county was told two years ago, Demming said, that the two-story barns along the freeway where the mushrooms are actually grown would be dismantled and moved to a new site further south in either Watsonville or Monterey County.

Company officials said yesterday that they knew of no plans to relocate the Soquel plant.

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