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HEADLINE: Colorful Harvest expands on Florida strawberries

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By Doug Ohlemeier

Jud Pray (from left), director of sales and business development for Colorful Harvest LLC, Salinas, Calif., with Casey Rose, salesman, and Doug Ranno, chief operating officer and managing partner, at a new Colorful Harvest strawberry field south of Plant City, Fla., in late October. The California-based berry and melon grower-shipper is significantly increasing its presence in the Florida strawberry deal.

(Nov. 5, 1:54 p.m.) PLANT CITY, Fla. — Salinas, Calif.-based Colorful Harvest LLC is making big expansions into the Sunshine State.

Before the start of Florida's strawberry season, Salinas, Calif.-based Colorful Harvest — which packs under the **Green Giant Fresh** brand and its own labels — added strawberry acreage and opened a Florida office.

Doug Ranno, chief operating officer and managing partner, said the expansions won't change the supply relationship Colorful Harvest struck with Wishnatzki Farms in 2005 on strawberries and blueberries.

The company plans to maintain its relationship in supplying Wishnatzki California strawberries during Florida's off-season, but will now have its own Florida strawberry acreage, Ranno said. He declined to state Colorful Harvest's Florida acreage or volume but said new strawberry fields south of Plant City should substantially increase Florida volume, with an anticipated 35% increase in berry volume this season.

"So many people think Colorful Harvest is just mangoes and carrots and red corn," Ranno said. "That's why we like to talk about strawberries. Our volume in the past five years has grown substantially in the berry category each year. Our growth expectations for next year's business, already under contract, will probably be our largest growth year to date."

The Florida office is at the company's Trapnell Ranch Farm, south of Plant City.

The change is one of many developments Colorful Harvest has made in recent weeks. During the Produce Marketing Association's Fresh Summit 2008 on Oct. 24-27 in Orlando, Ranno said that the grower-shipper was to start shipping Uruguay blueberries via air into Miami and Los Angeles.

The second phase of Colorful Harvest's blueberry push has the year-round strawberry grower-shipper importing Argentine and Chilean blueberries during the fall. The Argentina product arrives through early spring, when Florida's blueberry program commences.

Ranno said most of the Florida blueberries Colorful Harvest expects to pack will come from Wishnatzki, but other growers might be added.

Colorful Harvest also is developing a Pacific Northwest blueberry deal, Ranno said.

Other items

Ranno said Colorful Harvest plans to announce a major change in the shipment of its sweet red corn from Belle Glade and Homestead this fall. That deal runs November through May.

Colorful Harvest also plans to add Georgia athena cantaloupe next spring. The company sources from Florida,

Arizona, Bakersfield, Calif., Mexico and Panama.

Instead of offloading imported blueberries into a cooler at airports, Ranno said Colorful Harvest plans to truck them to its California and Florida coolers to better manage the berries.

"A lot of guys go through different coolers," Ranno said. "We're unique in that we are able to load our blueberries right out of the strawberry coolers where the Florida and California strawberries are, in the same growing regions."

Colorful Harvest grows and ships strawberries from Oxnard, Calif., Santa Maria, Calif., Salinas, Plant City and Mexico.

The company ships blueberries from Florida, central and southern California, Mexico, Argentina and Chile.

Blackberries and raspberries are shipped from Watsonville, Calif., Southern California, Mexico and Guatemala.

The company also ships organic berries.

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