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Winter volume picks up for Boskovich

November 12, 2015

Unlike many other Western vegetable producers, Boskovich Farms Inc. does not really go through a transition from its summer to winter production.

The company is headquartered in Oxnard, CA, in the heart of Ventura County. With its coastal and Southern California location, the area has mild temperatures 12 months of the year, which allows for year round production. "We don't go through a transition like many of our competitors," said Sales Manager Russell Widerburg. "We don't have to move our equipment or switch packing or shipping locations. We package, process and ship from here [Oxnard] all year long."



Celery is a Boskovich product. The company does have a diversified portfolio of growers and does produce in several different districts, including Mexico, but Oxnard remains the hub of its activity year round. For other year-round shippers

headquartered in the Salinas Valley, a couple of hundred miles north, late October/early November typically includes moving day. That's the day the harvesters are loaded up and trucked down to the desert districts in California and Arizona. A few days earlier, the winter packaging sheds and shipping offices and docks are opened up and made ready for the five month winter deal.

Widerburg said the firm does have a shipping location in Yuma, AZ, that enables it to consolidate its production from that general region. Often that product is shipped to final destination from Yuma, but it is just as likely to come to the Oxnard facility for processing and/or shipping.

Heading into the 2015-16 crop, the Boskovich executive said the firm's product mix is fairly typical for this time of year. Many of the labor intensive crops, such as green onions, radishes and brussels sprouts, are being grown in larger numbers in Mexico. The company's product line is broad and diversified including many staple vegetables such as celery and carrots, a host of herbs, and many leafy items, such as kale and spinach. The firm also has a robust line up of value-added produce.

Widerburg said the trendy items, such as brussels sprouts and kale, are still on their upward sales trajectory. "The amount of brussels sprouts that we grow and sell would have been unthinkable just a few years ago," he said.

He noted that the food shows and magazine continue to tout these products, which is fueling demand at both foodservice and at home.

Speaking to *The Produce News* in late October, Widerburg said the holiday pull was just under way. He said celery appeared to be in short supply selling in the low \$20s on an f.o.b. basis. He believes demand will exceed supply through Thanksgiving, possibly leading to even higher prices as that holiday approaches. brussels sprouts was another item where demand appears to be exceeding supply this holiday season. Widerburg said brussels sprouts has been a very good item this summer and fall often selling in the \$30 range. He estimated that the break-even point on this labor-intensive crop was in the \$16 to \$18 range, so a market price almost double that gives the growers and shippers a very nice return.

In general, he said demand has been good this summer for vegetables and expects the fairly strong market to continue throughout the year. Weather has played a very important role as a hot summer reduced yields and kept supply a bit below the demand level.

Moving into this winter, the predicted El Nino is what everyone is talking about. While there is fairly universal agreement that California will be hit with above average rainfall from December through March, Widerburg said there is no real way to plan for that. It is just impossible to know when the rain will hit or how hard. Boskovich, he said, has maintained its regular planting schedule and will just deal with the weather when, and if, it emerges. He said forecasters do not have an excellent track record as Oxnard was hit with several stronger storms this summer than predicted. "We just have to wait and see what happens." He said. "I'll believe it when I see it."

He added that the company's diversification — growing in both Mexico and Ventura County with a large number of crops — should help in maintaining a steady supply of production even through the worst storms.

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