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Blossom Hill sees potential for a strong apricot season

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When it comes to apricots, Blossom Hill knows what it's doing.

The company, with operations in Patterson, CA, has been growing and shipping the fruit for more than 35 years, and that experience allows its team to provide sweet and juicy apricots to consumers across the country, with most of its business coming through sales of fresh fruit in the United States, as well as Mexico and Canada.

Blossom Hill is also a major player in organic apricots as 150 of its 1,000 acres are dedicated to organic fruit. Jim Lucich, the firm's sales manager, said this year's crop is looking good.

"We see a good supply and good quality, good size of the fruit," he said, adding that the keys to a successful crop include the right amount of chill hours and good weather in the spring.

Blossom Hill got its start when Lucich's grandfather, Louis, who arrived at Ellis Island from Croatia in 1917, settled in California's Santa Clara Valley, where he first planted apricots. Jim's father, Nicholas, later moved to Patterson, which is known as the apricot capital of the world due to its soil and climate.

The family's long and rich history is coming in handy at this challenging time, as this season will start toward the end of April while the world deals with the Coronavirus pandemic.

"We're facing this economic climate with COVID-19, and that's something we haven't faced before," Lucich said. "We're not sure how the market will react to tree fruit, apricots, stone fruit,

cherries. We want to continue to promote and make sure we price apricots in a way that they will sell. We understand a lot of people are dealing with economic downturns in their lives, so we're approaching this season with all of that in mind."

There are indications that sales could be strong.

"More people are eating at home," he said. "Retail produce sales are up 15 to 20 percent. As long as people are financially able to have some discretionary money to spend on tree fruit, we think they'll want to buy them. We see people wanting to eat well at home and I think we can add to that."

The trend of people staying in, creates an opportunity to market the dishes that can be made with apricots.

"As people are cooking more at home, they research recipes, and apricots can be added to salads and smoothies and you can bake with them," Lucich said. "There are a lot of ways to use them and people are doing that. Kids are helping cook in the kitchen and apricots can be a big part of that."

Blossom Hill is also focusing its efforts on new varieties that Lucich said offer true apricot flavor, because of their higher sugar content and lower acidity.

"It's important to put out a quality apricot out there for people so that they can experience that great apricot flavor, and that brings them back to the store for more," he said. "We've been doing this for a long time and you have to put good-eating apricots out, and there's more research and development on those varieties and we work hard to make sure we have those planted and keep them in the pipeline for families to enjoy. We want to see more people eating apricots and using them in recipes. We want to encourage great experiences for people who eat them."

(Pictured above are John Santos, David Santos, Nicholas Lucich, Peter Lucich, Jim Lucich, and Nick Lucich holding his son Jadon Lucich.)

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