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Top Brass confident in new grape varieties

By

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Grapes are an important variety to Top Brass as it has been for many decades now.

“We enjoy the vast diversity of our crops, but grapes are unique in the sense that they truly represent the grower’s ability themselves,” said Brett Dixon, president of Top Brass. “We like to feel we have upheld a very high standard of family farming which continues to produce a product that is quality driven as opposed to corporate budget farming.”

The family farm first began with cattle in 1938 and ventured to the southern part of the San Joaquin Valley in 1956 with cotton back then. In 1962, the company began growing its initial 40 acres of table grapes and have been growing in this category every year since that time.

“As the farm has evolved, cattle and cotton no longer exist as we began to place more of an emphasis on table grapes of which we now run from late June into December,” Dixon said.

The winning philosophy at Top Brass is to farm the best final product as possible, something Dixon feels sets the company apart from the rest.

“As we see more and more corporate farming enter the market, we also see a unique opportunity to do what we do best as a family farm and that is to continually evolve on a daily basis according to what the vines needs dictate,” he said. “While this type of farming is more costly, we are able to produce a more consistent final product than many of our competitors.”

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, Top Brass felt fortunate to have a loyal following of customers who could count on having a clean box of fruit arrive which will last on their shelves.

“In regard to COVID-19, we have also been fortunate,” Dixon said. “We have had an in-house food-safety team for decades now and were able to quickly adapt to the PPE standards and keep our employees safe and working during a difficult time in society.”

Among recent grape trends, Top Brass is seeing more and more of the highly flavored candied varieties becoming more popular.

“We have been planting these varieties for several years now and are anxious to be able to offer even more of these varieties in this approaching season,” Dixon said. “We are confident in some of these new varieties and our ability to nurture them to their full potential. This year includes more

production of Sweet Scarlet, Allison, Ivory, Great Green, Sweet Globe, Sweet Bond, Gracernote, Candy Crunch, Candy Hearts, Candy Drops and Candy Snaps.”

On the retail level, he advises that educating the consumer is always helpful, especially with these new varieties.

“That is why we are noting the actual variety on our bags so that the consumer doesn’t feel they are just another red, green or black grape,” Dixon said. “These new varieties are extremely flavorful and we feel confident that once customers get a taste of these new flavors, that it will keep them coming back for more.”

As of late May, Top Brass has seen very favorable weather and its crops are looking early and clean.

“We tip the enormous bunches we have seen which reduces the number of boxes per acre, but also produces larger berries that color evenly,” Dixon said. “We are seeing many of our competitors not doing this, which will just create more grapes on the bottom end of the spectrum in the industry. But that is not where we tend to compete anyway. So the industry may see a two-tiered level of pricing, mostly distinguishing the family run farms from the corporate natured ones who go after volume as opposed to quality.”

Elsewhere around the company, Top Brass is currently doubling its solar panels and continue to hold sustainability as part of its future.

“We also added Brady Dixon from the table grape quality control area of the company into the sales office this year and look forward to him being able to share his knowledge with more customers,” Dixon said.

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