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**Jalisco hothouse the latest of GR Fresh's developments**

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By

Tad Thompson

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GR Fresh, a major grower-packer-importer of fresh Mexican vegetables, will begin a new deal, shipping colored Bell peppers from a new region in Jalisco. Tony Incaviglia, the firm's vice president sales and marketing, said this is an entrée to shipping colored Bells 12 months a year.

"We always have been, and we always are looking toward handling something new," said Incaviglia, who works from the weeks-old GR Fresh cold warehouse and office facility in McAllen, TX.

He elaborated that the Jalisco pepper deal involved red, yellow and orange Bell peppers. "It's a nice retail item produced in a controlled environment. We will have the ability to ship year round."

GR Fresh will produce in the Jalisco facility from August through January and "will then change to other areas for a full-year program." This hot house colored Bell program "is a nice deal for us. It is an item that is very popular with consumers, and also completes our Bell pepper category with its year-round availability."

Otherwise, GR Fresh is always aware of continuous improvement. "It's great to complete categories and grow new items, and as long as we do not lose focus on what got us here, we need to continue to do what we do better." What GR Fresh generally has done is grow, pack and import Roma and grape tomatoes, as well as green Bell peppers, cucumbers, avocados and eggplant. "Those are our staple items."

The new warehouse is "everything and more" as far as meeting the expectations of GR Fresh, Incaviglia said.

As The Produce News reported June 3, the ribbon cutting for the new state-of-the-art warehouse and cold storage facility was held May 26.

The facility has a capacity to hold 150 truckloads and includes 50,000 square feet of cooling space, 17,000 square feet of dock space, 12,000 square feet of office space and a 10,000-square-foot packing area. It also has a generator that can provide back-up power to the entire facility for up to a week.

The grand opening marked the first phase of the project, which broke ground 15 months ago. A second phase is planned, which will feature another 50,000 square feet and capacity for another 150 truckloads of product.

Incaviglia said June 29 that the new warehouse is "exactly what we needed.

"At this point in our growth it will allow us to raise our efficiency, service levels and be more creative

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and innovative. With a 10,000-square-foot repack room, there are a lot more packaging possibilities. We have the innovation piece and new packaging available to us.”

Incaviglia continued: “That’s what we all strive for. The most important piece is to have efficiency, service level and innovation.”

In the early 1990s, GR Fresh was among Mexico’s first growers to open a McAllen warehouse.

The company is owned by Grupo GR in Torreón, Mexico. GR are the initials of the founder Juan Gonzalez Reyes, who had two sons and eight daughters. Gonzalez started the firm in 1943.

Today, Gonzalez’s grandsons Antonio Villalobos and Luis Webb and his son Miguel Gonzalez run the company.

On July 1, Antonio Villalobos indicated plans to start building the 50,000-square-foot addition to the new McAllen facility by the end of 2022.

Villalobos said the new Jalisco facility is 40 acres of plastic greenhouse. Plans call for an expansion to more than 150 acres within for years. The colored Bells are packed at the farm location, and while most of the product is shipped to McAllen, some crosses in Nogales.

“We’ve had this planned for quite a while,” he said. “We grow little by little each year.”

Looking toward the near future, Incaviglia said, “Organics is our next opportunity, and with the right partner it is achievable. The growth in organics continues from year to year, and we need to be a part of that growth. So, stay tuned as we continue to chase this opportunity.”

### **This marketing season**

Villalobos said that this summer Mexican fields have seen “good weather and the markets have been decent. Production on most items has been pretty decent.”

He said his firm’s summer shipping season peaks from June to August.

“We’re now in full swing,” he said July 1. The company was shipping Roma and grape tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplant, carrots and western veg, such as lettuce and celery.

The “summer” volume plateaus in September for GR Fresh in September and finishes in November, when the firm moves to Mexican Pacific Coast production.

### **Labor supplies**

Villalobos said Mexican farm and packing labor in Mexico has been declining for four or five years. The Covid crisis worsened labor supplies to the point that the firm chose not to plant some acreage when there was the likelihood of not having sufficient labor to harvest.

Villalobos said labor supplies were improving thus far in 2021. He said Mexican citizens are showing less resistance to Covid vaccinations than U.S. citizens. He expects and hopes that 70 percent of the Mexican population will be vaccinated by the end of 2021.

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Incaviglia said, "Labor is an issue everywhere. We feel it here in Texas, and not as much in Mexico. We've had a dedicated labor crew for years in Mexico."

GR Fresh operates distribution centers in Mexico, and also ships to customers throughout the United States and Canada.

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