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Divine Flavor proud of worker focus

By

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With the West Mexico vegetable deal just starting to get underway and the transition from fall production in full swing, Nogales, AZ-based Divine Flavor was interested in focusing the limelight on its employees, including its frontline workers in the field.

Michael DuPuis, quality assurance and public relations coordinator for the 15-year-old firm with even deeper roots, said “it all starts with the workers. We do anything we can to improve the lives of our workers.”



Luis

Batiz

That effort is buoyed by Divine Flavor’s partnership with Fair Trade USA. “We started with Fair Trade in 2013 and we just received the final numbers from our latest impact report,” he said. “Since 2013, we have invested \$7.5 million in community development funds through the program. Just this year, the program has increased 25 percent and produced \$1.3 million.”

As is defined by Fair Trade participation provisions, worker committees in each community determine how the money is to be spent. DuPuis said many different projects have been undertaken that involve such activities as building health clinics for the entire community, improving educational opportunities for workers and their children, and purchasing medical equipment for local use. “During COVID, there was a lot of money spent on providing PPE (personal protection equipment) for the various communities. We’ve seen a lot of successes with the Fair Trade funds.”

In addition to those dollars, Divine has established its own foundations to directly improve the life of workers. DuPuis said those monies are used in various ways, including to create monthly events for the employees, offer recreational and sports activities, establish gyms and develop continuing education programs.

Continuing the theme of focusing on its work staff for this report, DuPuis shined the light on two Nogales-based employees — one veteran and one new to the firm. “Luis Batiz is our most veteran salesman. He was a founding team member of Divine Flavor when we started about 15 years ago.”

He added that Luis is the nephew of Pedro Batiz, one of the founders of the company. “He is the senior category manager for all of our conventional hot house vegetables, which includes, Bell peppers, mini peppers, tomatoes. He wears a lot of hats for us.”

DuPuis revealed that Batiz grew up in Nogales and has been working in the industry since he was a teenager. “He is a passionate worker on the sales side and has been instrumental in helping us get to the next level.”

One of Divine’s newest employees is Ernie Chamberlain, another Nogales native with deep roots in the produce industry. He worked for several different sales organization before joining Divine a few months ago. “Ernie started in produce when he was 18 years old. He is a family-first kind of guy, which is what we like at Divine,” said DuPuis. “He’s been in the business about 20 years, and he loves the game. He is bringing a lot of experience and expertise to the team.”

Dupuis relayed that Chamberlain’s goal is to bring “ethnically sourced and highly regulated Fair Trade certified products to our customers.”

Pivoting back to the current transition period during this mid-November conversation, DuPuis said, “November is always a tricky month. Supplies tend to be tight as we finish in one area and move to the next area.”

But he added that the transition should be finished by mid-December and the company will start operating on all cylinders again especially on its production of peppers and tomatoes with both organic and conventional offerings. DuPuis revealed that Divine Flavor is one of the largest bell pepper growers in Mexico and will have a full array of green and colored bells as well as mini peppers, along with its wide range of tomato varieties. They also offer both organic and conventional cucumbers with production lasting well into the spring and have a squash program as well.

The Divine Flavor executive said there have been no major weather problems this year and with much of its growing taking place in controlled environments, DuPuis expects no supply problems from mid-December on. “Once we get started, supplies will continue to increase,” he said. “January is looking like a great month for all of our crops.”

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