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**iDeal HarBest sets course for further growth and success**

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By

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Nogales, AZ — Carving out a niche in the Nogales produce scene can be a daunting task, given the number of longtime produce operations that do business in the area.

But in the five short years since iDeal HarBest opened its doors, it has successfully made a name for itself as a quality operation that is aligned with excellent growers and provides a high level of service to its customers.

iDeal HarBest is the brainchild of partners Hermy Torres and Manny Fajardo, each of who draw on years of experience in the produce industry.

Torres, a certified management accountant, held positions in finance and administration with some of the top shippers, including Nature's Choice Produce, SunFed and Royal Flavor, prior to joining forces with Fajardo to form iDeal HarBest in 2016.

Fajardo literally worked his way up the ranks of the produce industry, beginning in 1986 as a dispatcher for Franks Distributing. From there, he joined RB Packing in 1992, first working as a dispatcher and then eventually as operations manager. He joined Wilson Produce in 2002 as operations manager, eventually getting into sales and rising to sales manager, where he remained until 2016 when he left to start iDeal HarBest.

"Manny and I complement each other," Torres said. "I concentrate on the finance and administrative end, and Manny focuses on marketing and sales."

Torres said the two had been in the planning stages for several years to form their own company, but they let the idea germinate for a while before taking action.

"For many years we entertained the idea of joining forces and going into business for ourselves, until the time that we finally believed that conditions were aligned enough so we could take on the risk," said Torres.

Once they agreed to join forces, they shared a desire to put emphasis on securing the best returns for their growers.

"We had good support from our growers from the very beginning in 2016, and we are always transparent with them and try to meet their needs," said Torres. "We took some risks, but everything has worked out, and we have been growing every year as a business."

Asked about the unusual spelling and the meaning behind the name iDeal HarBest, Fajardo said the

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“I” in iDeal is a nod to being technologically savvy. And the capital “B” in HarBest is just a way to reinforce that they provide the best quality and service.

Fajardo said as iDeal HarBest is set to embark on its sixth season, they are very optimistic about what lies ahead in their future.

“Our focus has been on being a year-round supplier of summer squash, both organic and conventional,” he said. “But we also have conventional and organic Bell peppers (both green and colored), slicer cukes and grape tomatoes. And we are constantly looking for items to add to our year-round offerings.”

The partners said they try to differentiate iDeal HarBest from the competition by providing a higher level of customer service than what is offered elsewhere.

“It’s the strong relationships we have with our customers that keeps them coming back,” said Torres. “We keep the lines of communication open and transmit information from the grower to the sales desk to the customer so everyone knows what to expect. We want to make it as clean and clear as possible from the grower all the way through to the customer.”

Fajardo agreed, adding, “Every summer we seek feedback from our customers to see what they want and how we can help. We also keep an eye on trends and try to adjust our business accordingly.”

Fajardo said that feedback has directed them to increase its organic acreage to the point where the conventional-organic split is now 60-40.

“We are now in our fifth season with organic Brussels sprouts, which are going strong and in high demand,” he said. “We’re planning to keep increasing acreage in response to demand, and we offer a number of different packs to meet customer needs.”

Fajardo said new this season is an iDeal HarBest branded pouch for mini sweet peppers and Roma tomatoes. “We’ll be looking to add more branded items in the future, and we also do private labeling for major retail accounts.”

While Torres spends most of his time overseeing the business from his San Diego office, Fajardo is joined in the Nogales office by key employees Lory Rodriguez, who has known Fajardo since childhood and has been at iDeal HarBest since November 2020, and Daniel Baltazar, who is in his third season at the company and works in food safety and quality control, but is becoming increasingly more involved in sales.

“Danny has been in the produce industry for more than 25 years and previously worked at Produce Exchange, Farmers Best, Coast Produce and GreenPoint, so he knows the business well,” said Fajardo. “He also accompanies me on trips to Mexico to visit with growers and make sure we are keeping the highest standards.”

As for Rodriguez, Fajardo said that while she is more behind the scenes right now, handling accounts payables and receivables, and a bit of everything else, he is looking to get her more involved in sales.

He added that Ignacio Sapien has also recently joined the company as grower relations manager in Mexico, which gives the company an extra set of boots on the ground.

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“We are very confident with where we are and what we are doing,” said Torres. “We know it is a very competitive business, and so that is why we’re very selective with our growers and our own team. This has enabled us to grow every year in careful, measured steps.”

“Our story proves that if you work hard, you can accomplish your goals,” said Fajardo.

“I know the business from the ground up, and we know what it takes to succeed. That’s why we only work with the best growers.”

*Photo: Manny Fajardo, a partner in iDeal HarBest, with Lory Rodriguez and Daniel Baltazar at the company’s warehouse in Nogales, AZ.*

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