



- Advertisement -

Grower Alliance adds logistics and procurement divisions

By

John Groh

February 7, 2022

Since its founding 15 years ago, Grower Alliance has been focused on providing its customers with the highest quality fruits and vegetables, and the best possible customer service. The company has doubled down on that commitment with the launch of two new divisions.

Michelle Jacobson of Grower Alliance said the company opened Grower Alliance Logistics in October following the merger with Lugos Trucking. It now has eight tractor trailers that will enable it to better facilitate transportation for its products.

“Our owners had wanted to open a logistics division for a while to help our sales team with freight availability,” she said. “There was a bit of a learning curve as we had to get up to speed on all the [Department of Transportation] regulations, but now that we are there, it has been going well.”

Jacobson said part of the learning curve stemmed from the fact that Grower Alliance designated some of its staff to be trained in logistics to oversee the division, and in fact she is taking a lead role in the effort.

“Grower Alliance has a staff of around 30, and we reallocated a number of them to run the logistics division,” she said. “We felt it was very important to have inside staff be in charge, and that they be fully trained in logistics. We are very big on safety protocols at Grower Alliance, and we wanted to make sure to cross all of our ‘T’s and dot all of our ‘I’s.

“It’s going well so far,” she added, “and we expect it to continue to grow, which will be crucial for the overall growth and staff development of our company.”

The procurement division, Grow-All Procurement, was begun in November and serves as a brokerage. While the Grower Alliance sales team acts as the marketing arm for its growers, the brokerage complements it by outsourcing and consolidating customers’ individual produce needs.

“We had talked about developing our brokerage firm for a while, and when the opportunity arose, we decided it was the right time and the right people,” said Jorge Quintero Jr., one of Grower Alliance’s managing members.

“We talk with anywhere from 15 to 30 shippers a day,” said John Meek, sales manager for Grow-All Procurement, formerly of Bay Area Produce, who brings four decades of experience to his role.

“Grower Alliance sells what their growers send, and Grow-All Procurement sells whatever is in town,” added Jerry Meek, who, like his brother, was most recently with Bay Area and has worked in the produce industry for 40 years.

Grow-All Procurement includes a staff of 13, including three employees in the California office. Among the employees is Olga de la Torre, a 22-year industry veteran, who got her start as a part-time secretary at Bay Area Produce before moving over to a sales position.

“I had no intention of going into sales,” said de la Torre. “But when my mentor retired, she called her customers and introduced me as their new sales rep.”

The accounts de la Torre inherited were carefully cultivated through Canada and today make up an important part of Grow-All’s customer base.

Another key employee for Grow-All is Ruben Zuniga Jr., who began his produce career in the mid-1980s as a loader for San Rafael Produce before joining the Meek brothers at Bay Area Produce, first as a bird dog and then eventually as a member of the sales team.

“I gave Ruben the Blue Book and told him to call and quote some customers,” said John Meek. “He did it, and it paid off.”

Zuniga has worked with the Meek brothers for over 35 years, which is a testament to the loyalty that resides with Grow-All Procurement.

In addition to a dedicated sales team, the Meek brothers also have a committed foundation of warehouse operatives who bring many years of experience to Grower Alliance’s newly formed Grow-All Procurement division.

Photo: Members of the Grow-All Procurement team include (from left) Teresita Molina, accounting specialist; Susana Doolittle, accounting specialist; John Meek, general manager; Jerry Meek, sales manager; Olga de la Torre, sales; Ruben Zuniga Jr., sales; and Carlos (Nestle) Martinez, general foreman. Not shown are Bon Loyst, California manager; Deborah Noyes, California administrator; and Donna Handa, California sales.

[Print](#)