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iDeal HarBest continues to invest in growth

By

John Groh, publisher

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Nogales-based vegetable shipper [iDeal HarBest](#) is no longer the new kid on the block, now in its seventh year in business and showing impressive year-over-year growth.

In fact the company had a record year in 2022, and 2023 started off strong, with sales in January alone eclipsing total sales of its inaugural year.

But maintaining that growth trajectory is no easy feat, according to Manny Fajardo, a principle at iDeal along with business partner Hermy Torres.

“One of the keys for us has been attending the industry trade shows, like the OPS,” said Fajardo. “We have been going to more and more, and it helps us to get our name out there and also make valuable connections.”

Fajardo acknowledged that it is indeed an investment to attend the trade shows, between the cost of booth space, promotional materials and travel expenses. “So we try to make the most of all these trips,” he said. “We come back with a lot of new ideas — and a lot of homework.”

Torres added that while the industry conventions are a great place to meet potential new customers, they also offer an opportunity to develop new business partnerships with growers, which is essential for the company’s growth plans.

“One of the reasons we have been able to grow is because we have added more to our product lines, and extended some to become year-round programs,” he said. “That is only possible if you have the right grower partners that can meet the high standards that we demand for our products.”

Fajardo said one of the success stories for iDeal HarBest has been its organic Brussels sprouts program, which currently runs from December through June. It was one of the early items that the company brought to market when it formed in 2016, and it has seen steady growth during the past six years.

“It is something that sets us apart,” he said of the organic Brussels sprouts, “and it is something we are looking to expand into a year-round program by identifying new areas of production in Mexico.”

Also on the organic side, Fajardo said iDeal will begin offering cucumbers and hard shell squash.

“The organic lines offer a nice complement to our main programs,” he said. “We now have summer squash as a year-round item, and we will be back again this year with our grape tomatoes, which we hope to expand into a year-round program as well.”

Packaging is another way that iDeal HarBest looks to stand out, said Fajardo. The company offers private labeling for customers who request it, and it also offers a wide variety of packaging options to meet the needs of its clients.

“We encourage our customers to speak with us about these packaging options,” said Torres. “All of our packaging happens at the farm level, and this offers the advantage of additional freshness delivered to the customer, as well as it being more efficient and cost-effective.”

Other investments have occurred closer to home at its Nogales facility, with a recent expansion of its cold storage, which is a big selling point to its clients, according to Adrian Gonzalez, who is in sales at iDeal.

“It gives us the flexibility to expand certain programs, and it ensures that the cold chain is consistently maintained,” said Gonzalez.

“And the additional cold storage capacity allows us to offer different types of packouts,” added Fajardo. “We can also offer cold storage services to our clients, which is another way for us to stand out.”

While everything is trending in the right direction for iDeal, Torres said he and Fajardo and the rest of the team are not willing to rest on the laurels of their past success.

“When you reach a certain level of respect in the industry, it becomes even more important to work hard to maintain that reputation,” he said.

“The challenges definitely increase,” added Fajardo. “Now, we are competing against the ‘big boys,’ so you have to stay hungry because the percentage of new business shrinks as you get bigger, so it becomes more competitive.”

That’s why having the right team in place is key to continued success, according to Torres, who referred to dedicated staff members Danny Baltazar and Lory Rodriguez as serving in important behind-the-scenes roles.

“We are very excited about the new products we are adding to our program, including the organic cucumbers and hard squash, so we can have more products to offer our customers,” said Baltazar.

“We are all very excited about the growth, and I am happy to be here to support our efforts,” said Rodriguez.

“The goals we have set are very high,” said Fajardo. “We don’t want to just meet what we did last year, we want to shoot higher. We want our customers and growing partners to see how hard we are working for them and to know the fire we have inside of us to succeed.”

“We are so proud of the team we have built that has allowed us to accomplish the goals we have set for ourselves, and we will continue to grow,” added Torres. “We have plans to continue to add to our team to help achieve those goals we have for growth. As a result of our continued expansion, new career opportunities will soon be available at iDeal HarBest, especially in our sales department.”

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About John Groh | 

John Groh graduated from the University of San Diego in 1989 with a bachelors of arts degree in English. Following a brief stint as a sportswriter covering the New York Giants football team, he joined The Produce News in 1995 as an assistant editor and worked his way up the ranks, becoming publisher in 2006. He and his wife, Mary Anne, live in northern New Jersey in the suburbs of New York City.

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