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Generational Fort Boise brings on new sales manager

By

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[Fort Boise Produce](#), now overseen by the fourth generation of the homesteading Farmer family, kicked off the 2023-24 season with a new sales manager and continuation of its longstanding commitment to quality and service.

Jacob Gaschler, whose official start date with Fort Boise was Jan. 1, stepped into the position with solid roots in produce and familiarity with the region. Gaschler grew up in Ontario, OR, and attended Portland State University where he earned a B.S. in Public Health.

He said that after several years of living in Western Oregon, he moved back to the Treasure Valley. His professional background is centered largely around the tech industry, and most recently he held the position of business development manager for a software-as-a-service, or SaaS, startup company. in Boise, ID.

“I’m eager to bring my perspective to the sales role for Fort Boise Produce while getting back to my roots in the produce industry,” he said.

Gaschler’s Treasure Valley roots fit well with those of Fort Boise, which were planted more than a century ago when James Farmer from Utah brought his family to the area to homestead in Western Idaho. As the love for land and farming has been passed from one generation to the next in the intervening century, Idaho-E. Oregon soil has been stewarded by the Farmer family with an array of crops produced, including yellow, red and white Spanish Sweet onions that have become trademarks of the Treasure Valley.

The growing/packing/shipping business in Parma, ID, was led for decades by brothers Jim and Warren, both of whom are officially “semi-retired” but who shared their own experience and that of their grandfather, James, and their father, Warren.

In the early years of the homestead, James Farmer was a sheep farmer and raised subsistence crops. That livelihood evolved with his and Warren Sr.’s post-WWII row crop production. The enterprise was successful, and ultimately that operation became Warren’s farm, and he raised sugar beets, lettuce, potatoes and onions, all of which grow well in the soil and climate of the Treasure Valley.

Brothers Jim and Warren Farmer, along with original business partner Tom Moore, launched Fort Boise Produce in the 1980s, and the Farmers went on to become sole owners. Jim held the position of president/director, and Warren was vice-president/director.

Jim, who earned degrees in accounting and economics from the University of Utah, has lived most of his life in Nyssa, OR, with his wife Peggy, where they raised their five children. Prior to co-founding

Fort Boise, Jim served in the U.S. Marine Corps. Warren is longtime operator of partner farm, Deseret Farms, in Nyssa, OR. He is father of Kara and has two grandchildren.

Jim's son, Joe, grew up in Nyssa, OR, and has worked on the family farm and in the packing operation his whole life. He joined the business in 2003 after earning a B.S. in finance at the University of Utah and working for several years in management at Qwest Communications. Today, he is general manager and oversees operations at the onion facility that is centrally-located near Parma, ID, and Nyssa, OR. Joe has served on the board of directors of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Committee as well as the Idaho-E. Oregon Marketing Order Export Committee. He and wife Tiffany and daughter Chloe live in Nyssa.

Other members of the Fort Boise team are CFO Stephen Parrott, who joined the company in 2020; Office Manager Norma Burbank, who has been with Fort Boise since 1997; Packing Facility/Grower Relations Manager Dave Larsen, a Fort Boise employee also since 1997; Food/Workplace Safety Coordinator Zac Jacobs, who came onboard in 2021; Packing Facility Manager Alberto Campuzano, who's been with Fort Boise since 1990; Shipping Manager Roy Castro, who came to the company in 1995; Deseret Farm Manager Wally Sweet, who started with the operation in 2018; Storage Manager Marvin Seuell, who joined in 2015; and Payroll/Accounting Specialist Eduardo Caldera, who came to Fort Boise in 2022.

Over the last two decades the company has experienced growth — physically and technologically. To assure quality control, the operation utilizes USDA inspections on all of packed onions. Fort Boise employs in-house inspectors certified by the State of Idaho to inspect onions based on grade standards set by the USDA.

Idaho state inspectors are at the Fort Boise daily to conduct inspections and ensure the onions meet those USDA US#1 grade standards — and Fort Boise has video inspections that allow customers to see exactly how onions look that are coming off of the packing line. The company also follows “One Step Forward, One Step Backward” traceability procedures for its onion products.

It also led the industry in providing on-line product traceability to consumers, enabling them to trace their purchased onions through a webpage where a video and map of the field shows exactly where the onions were grown and harvested. There is also a video of the grower and video of the onion packing operation, and it can all be found at www.TraceProduce.com.

Now in maintenance mode, the farming operation and packing facility have not had a lot in the way of big changes over the last 12 months. “Like most sheds, we are fine-tuning for better efficiency and automation,” Gaschler said.

With foodservice its primary market, Fort Boise continues to make inroads in that arena as well as retail, where demand was strongest during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With demand readjusting and consumers dining out in far greater numbers, grower/shippers are finding new ways to work with their customers. Gaschler said although last year, and 2021 as well, were impacted by weather and other issues, Fort Boise wrapped up the year on a positive note and headed into 2023-24 optimistically.

He commented on key challenges, saying, “Fort Boise will continue to adapt as necessary and strategize for the future. Labor shortages and new legislation are main concerns. We have the benefit of efficient freight loading capacity as well as railcar loading, so transportation isn't as great of

concern.” And, Gaschler said, “We keep a strong focus on our growers and try and help them maximize profit.”

He said, “The 2022 season ended well for us. It was challenging, but we were adaptive with a bit of transition. All in all, it was better than what we expected, and we’re looking forward to 2023.”

Photo: Sales Manager Jacob Gaschler joined Fort Boise Produce in January 2023. The Ontario, OR, native “is eager to bring his perspective to the sales role for Fort Boise Produce while getting back to his roots in the produce industry.” He, wife Annie and their two daughters live in Meridian, ID.

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