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Eagle Eye invests in facilities, technology

By

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October 9, 2023

After doubling its Treasure Valley onion supplies by merging with Fiesta Farms in Nyssa, OR, five years ago and entering an and exclusive sales and marketing arrangement with Central Produce in Payette, ID, in 2021, [Eagle Eye Produce](#) headed into the 2023-24 season with significant investments in its Idaho-E. Oregon facilities.

As the 2023-24 season got underway, Commodity Sales Manager Jason Pearson looked back at changes made since last season.

“Over the past year we’ve made some big investments in our business, specifically working on expanding and improving our onion supply,” he said. “As a result, we now have more reliable and better-quality supply of USA-grown onions for our customers. It’s been great to see the foodservice sector recover completely from the challenges during COVID-19, and it’s now performing even better than before.”

Pearson described changes and upgrades to the facilities, noting, “At our Nyssa warehouse we made some smart investments in a brand-new storage facility and binning equipment. The new storage facility has some impressive tech that will maintain a perfect climate for onions and maintain quality for longer periods of time. This upgrade is also going to make a big difference in how we handle our harvest and binning process, making them much more efficient. Now, we can receive, and ship finished products to our customers more effectively and it opens additional dock space.”

He went on to say upgrades have been made at Central Produce as well.

“Our warehouse in Payette has also been busy investing in improvements. They’ve added new automated packing equipment and have kept working on enhancing our consumer bagging capabilities.”

Director of Business Development Joe Ange said advancements have been made in the operation’s technology.

“Companywide, we have converted to all-digital processes for labeling, warehousing, and food safety to help improve efficiency,” Ange said. “We are more equipped now than ever to meet the needs of our foodservice and retail customers.”

Ange continued, “Our goal is to give our customers a personalized experience for their unique consumer base. That’s why we’re always on the hunt for the best packaging solutions and styles out there. We offer everything from 2-pound retail bags to 50-pound bags and even sling totes. We can offer private label solutions as well as our own to cater to each customer’s needs.”

Each cog in this Treasure Valley EEP wheel has a long history of commitment to quality and service in producing onions. Idaho Falls, ID-based Eagle Eye, with numerous partnerships not only in Idaho and Oregon but also in Washington, Texas, California and New Mexico, now grows, packs, and ships more than 100 million pounds of onions annually.

Established in 1996, Eagle Eye Produce started as a simple office in the laundry room of President/CEO Newman Giles and his wife, Kathy. It began with a focus on growing and shipping potatoes, expanding its product line over time to include domestically grown onions from Idaho-E. Oregon and other regions along with multiple varieties of melons, Nogales vegetables and value-added potato products. Eagle Eye also enlarged its grower network.

Central Produce and Fiesta Farms, as EEP's partners in the Treasure Valley onion industry, each brought generations of experience and dedication to the mix.

Fiesta Farms began as a Bybee family company well over 70 years ago through the efforts of Shay Bybee. Today Marc Bybee, grandson of Shay, oversees operations at the Nyssa, OR, facility where Eagle Eye onions are packed.

Over the past three-quarters of a century, other Bybee names have been part and parcel of Fiesta. Marc's late father, Garry, and Garry's brother, Jay, became owners of the family company in the late 1960s, and in the 70s Garry Bybee took over as sole owner. Its long history as a key force in the Treasure Valley meshes well with the history and goals of Eagle Eye, and more Bybee family members have come into the operation.

Central Produce began shipping in 1943. Over its eight decades the company has had several owners and growers, and it is currently owned by WBH Farms and Starr Island Farms, both multi-generational farms who came on in 2005.

As the veteran onion grower/packer/shippers well know, every year has its own challenges, and 2023 was no exception. Pearson and Ange each commented on last season with Ange saying, "Looking back on 2022, we are happy with how things turned out, and we saw a lot of growth in our onion program. Despite the growing challenges with reductions in quality and yield, we overcame them and performed well."

Ange continued, "Headed into 2023, we're concerned about rising costs in labor and production. The high input costs continue to be a major worry for us. They are still considerably higher than they were two years ago."

However, he said, "We expect to see an increase in yield this season, which helps offset or spread out some of the higher costs. Still, production costs are at historic highs, and we hope to see some relief moving forward."

Pearson cited transportation, saying that "On a positive note, availability has improved, and costs have come down compared to last year. It's much easier to find a truck lately." He went on to say, "But, even with the relief on the transportation side, if we were to say what the biggest pain point is, I think it would have to be the cost of fertilizer which is still significantly higher than it was two years ago."

"The upshot of this challenging business environment is that it has pushed us to make positive changes in how we operate. We really have no other choice but to respond with improvements,

including automated equipment, digitizing processes, implementing warehouse management, and embracing vertical integration,” Ange said. “I truly believe all these challenges have made us a better, stronger, and more adaptable company. Now we’re in a much better position to meet the needs of our foodservice and retail partners. We’re looking forward to the 2023 season, and we’re working closely with our customers and partners to make this another successful year at Eagle Eye.”

Photo: Eagle Eye Produce’s Nyssa, OR, crew gearing up for the 2023-24 season. Shown are Anthony Edmondson, Joe Ange, Austin Wagstaff, Marc Bybee, Tamara Bybee, Neil Berdowski, Jason Pearson and Kylee Schulthies Photo courtesy of Eagle Eye Produce

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About Kathleen Thomas Gaspar |

Kathleen is a Colorado native and has been writing about produce for more than three decades and has been a professional journalist for more than four decades. Over the years she's covered a cornucopia of crops grown both in the United States and abroad, and she's visited dozens of states – traveling by car from her home base in Colorado to the Northwest and Southeast, as far as Vancouver, BC, and Homestead, FL. Now semi-retired, Kathleen continues to write about produce and is also penning an ongoing series of fiction novels. She's a wife, mother of two grown sons and grandmother of six, and she and her fly fisherman husband Abe reside in the Banana Belt town of Cañon City.

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