

US

Sundale launches export arm

Californian grape grower-shipper Sundale Sales has launched an export division, headed up by Michael Astorga

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The Kinosian family has been farming grapes southeast of Visalia, California, since the 1930s. At first it was mostly wine varieties, along with some old-line Emperors and Thompsons for fresh consumption, but over the years the Kinosians gravitated to growing strictly table grapes.

Today, the company is known as Sundale Vineyards and has evolved into a major California grower-shipper of table grapes, projecting to pack as much as 3.6m cartons for the 2011 season with a heavy emphasis on late-season varieties such as Crimson Seedless, Scarlet Royal and Autumn King.

Since the early 1980s, Sundale Vineyards had relied on outside agencies to market and distribute their production. That changed in 2006 when the Kinosians decided to bring sales of their fruit in-house by forming their own marketing entity, Sundale Sales. Headed up by produce veteran Sean Stockton, Sundale Sales initially concentrated on domestic business, relying on US-based trading companies for exports. In keeping with the Kinosian family tradition of direct oversight of all facets of their business, however, it was only a matter of time before the company launched an export division, which

culminated in the hiring of Michael Astorga last June.

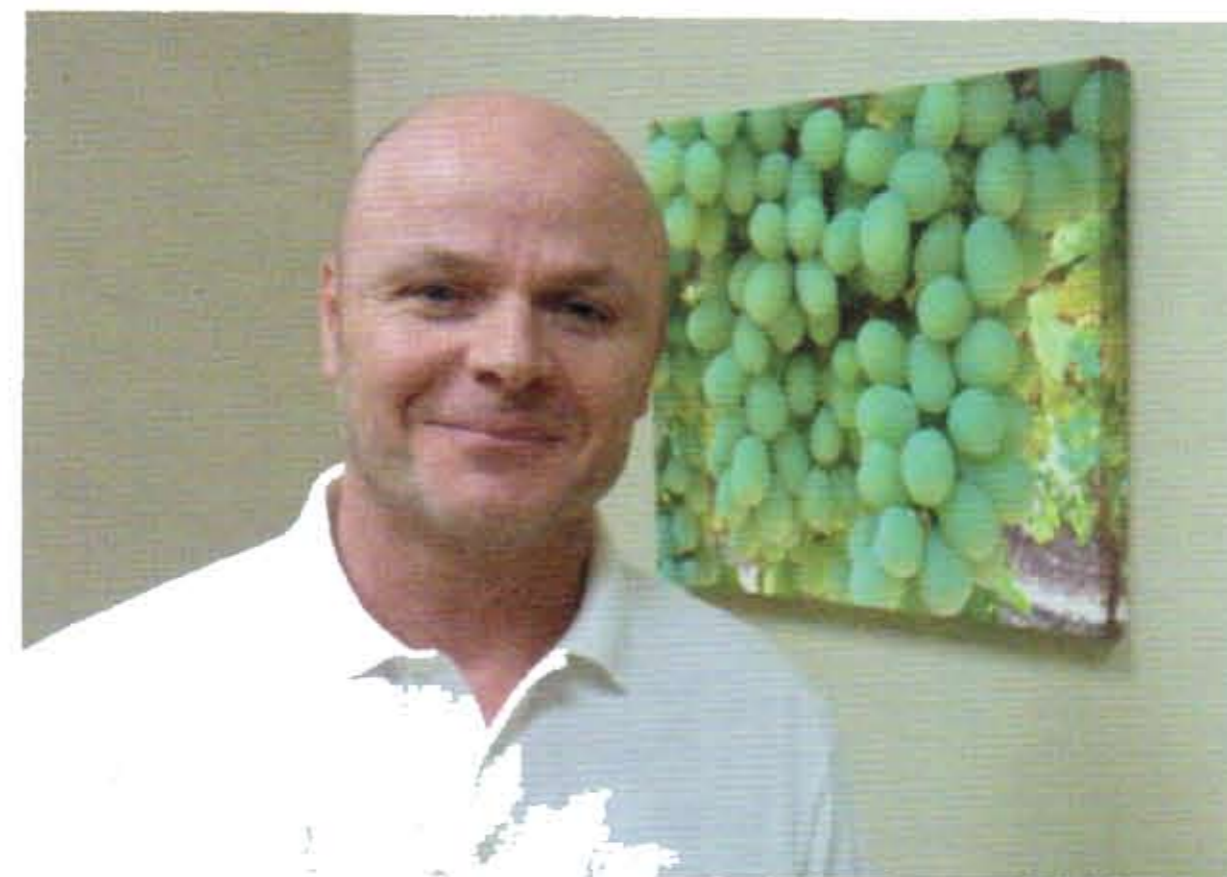
Mr Astorga has been in sales and distribution of fresh produce for the last 14 years, concentrating primarily on international markets.

"I started out with the CH Robinson Company's branch office in Visalia, importing tropicals to the US and exporting to Europe," says Mr Astorga. "Two years later, I went to work for Sunview Marketing (Delano, California), handling their exports of table grapes to most of Asia as well as to Central America and Europe – mainly to retailers. My time with Sunview was great but when the opportunity at Sundale presented itself I couldn't pass it up. They are giving me the chance to build what will be in essence an export trading company, from the ground up."

Mr Astorga says that Sundale Sales' international division will initially concentrate on developing export business for its table grapes in Asia as well as in Latin America and Europe.

"In the longer run, the plan is to expand our business to imports as well as other fresh categories," he says. "The goal is to build a trading company with table grapes as the foundation."

According to Mr Astorga, Sundale Vineyards is one of the state's largest growers of the new, late-season varieties



Sundale Sales export chief Michael Astorga

such as Autumn King and Scarlet Royal.

"We project to pack as much as 750,000 Autumn Kings and around 650,000 Scarlet Royals this season, which probably makes us the largest grower of these varieties in California," he comments. "Sundale also is a major grower of Crimson Seedless as well as Autumn Royals, with about 800,000 and 250,000 cartons respectively. Between all these varieties, we feel that Sundale Sales can offer a late-season programme to international markets that few companies can match."

Mr Astorga notes that Sundale Sales recently moved into new sales offices located above its state-of-the-art cold storage facility located east of Tulare, California. An expansion of the Sundale cold storage has also been completed in time for the 2011 season. ■