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Sundale Sales Inc. expands facilities, staff and production

By RAND GREEN

TULARE, CA — “Sundale is expanding,” said Sean Stockton, president of Sundale Sales Inc., here, and a partner in the company along with Aram Kinoshian and his son, Todd Kinoshian.

The Kinoshians are also “the primary owners of the ranches and do all the farming,” Mr. Stockton said. They will farm “close to 3 million boxes of table grapes this season, up significantly over the last couple of years.” That growth will continue, “primarily directed at new varieties, those being Scarlet Royals and Autumn Kings” as well as “our trademarked variety, Sundale Red.”

In addition, “we’ve expanded our staff, and we’ve expanded our cold storage,” he said.

New on sales this year is Pete Giotta, who previously spent 12 years with Pandol Bros. In addition, “we’ve moved Christy Salazar into a sales position,” working principally with exports and organic sales.

Also on sales is Brady Johnston, who is now in his third season with the company, Mr. Stockton said.

The cold storage ex-

pansion increased capacity by about 230,000 boxes, giving the facility nearly a 700,000-box capacity.

Within the next couple of months, Sundale will be breaking ground on a new office facility that will house sales as well as the offices for the farming operation, he said. That is expected to be completed by the 2010 season.

With those additions to staff, facilities and vineyards, “we are set to move into the next step of greater volume and greater opportunity that awaits us,” Mr. Stockton said.

With regard to varieties in which the company is increasing production, “the Scarlet Royal is a mid-season red seedless” with “great quality, great size and great production. And it comes at a perfect time in between Flames and Crimsons,” he said. That could be especially advantageous this year in light of “the Flame situation.”

The Flame harvest has been progressing quite rapidly, and the variety may finish earlier than usual. That could provide “an excellent opportunity for the Scarlet Royal to play a major role in the red seedless program this year,” he said.

Sundale is “the largest producer of Autumn King,” a late-season green seedless variety. “We have a lot invested in that variety, and we are a strong believer” that not only because of its size but because of its flavor as well, “it is going to be very successful in the marketplace for the late season.”

The variety is harvested “all the way into late October,” Mr. Stockton stated. He believes that having “a fresh grape out of California at fair market prices” that late in the season will have “a big impact” on the U.S. retail market, giving buyers a better alternative than bringing in Peruvian or Brazilian green seedless grapes.

Sundale Red, Mr. Stockton said, “is our late-seasons premium

red,” beginning in late September and harvested primarily in October and November. It has “jumbo size” and is “the best eating grape that I have ever had,” he said, adding that its storage ability and its eating ability “make it just a super grape at the end of the season.”

In “the three years that this marketing company has been here, going on our fourth season now,” the Sundale Red has become “a favorite of our customers,” he said. “Our production is increasing in that as well.”

This will be Sundale’s first year marketing organic grapes. “We started packing the end of last week,” and so far, “the response has been good,” Mr. Stockton said July 7. That

program, too, is expected to expand.

“We are actually looking for more organic ground to expand those ranches,” he added. “We are excited to see what ... this season brings with organics, to let us know how we need to plan for the future.”

The organic product will be packed in the “Mother Earth” label, and the company has a new box design for the product.

In its conventional program, Sundale is “a full-service packer” offering an assortment of pack styles such as tissue wraps, bags, RPCs and two-, three- and four-pound clamshells, he said.

The Kinoshians are continually looking for new areas of growth for the company, he said.



Pete Giotta, Christy Salazar, Brady Johnston and Sean Stockton of Sundale Sales Inc.