

Sunny Cove Citrus touts state-of-the-art traceback system

By BRIAN GAYLORD

Grower-owned Sunny Cove Citrus LLC in Orange Cove, CA, has a state-of-the-art packing facility on the east side of California's Central San Joaquin Valley. The company has made modifications to its plant to enhance its food-safety efforts.

"We've worked to track fruit from the harvest through the facility," said Keith Wilson, vice president of sales. Sunny Cove worked with John Deere Agri Services on the system, which tracks fruit from the harvest to the time the company packs it.

The traceability system uses field information, information on when the product was hauled and more. Global positioning system technology is utilized.

"Customers continue to innovate on food safety," Mr. Wilson said. "Key in our mind is true traceability. You have to make it a workable solution."

When Mr. Wilson spoke with *The Produce News* in mid-October, he said that Sunny Cove was trying to be realistic about the use of the system and to make sure that the system is up and running "to make the whole thing work from start to finish."

Sunny Cove expected to begin picking Navel oranges Nov. 3 in the central San Joaquin Valley, which is a later start than grower operations in Kern County, which lies in the southern San

Joaquin Valley.

California Navel volumes industrywide are estimated to be lower by 20-30 percent or more as compared with last year.

"We'll be off 25-30 percent [on Navels]," Mr. Wilson said. "You'll see some higher opening prices this year."

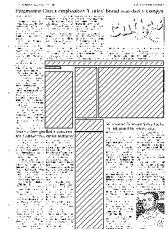
Sunny Cove will pick Valencia oranges beginning in March or early April, and if the Navel crop is light as expected, food-service may switch its focus to Valencias, Mr. Wilson said.

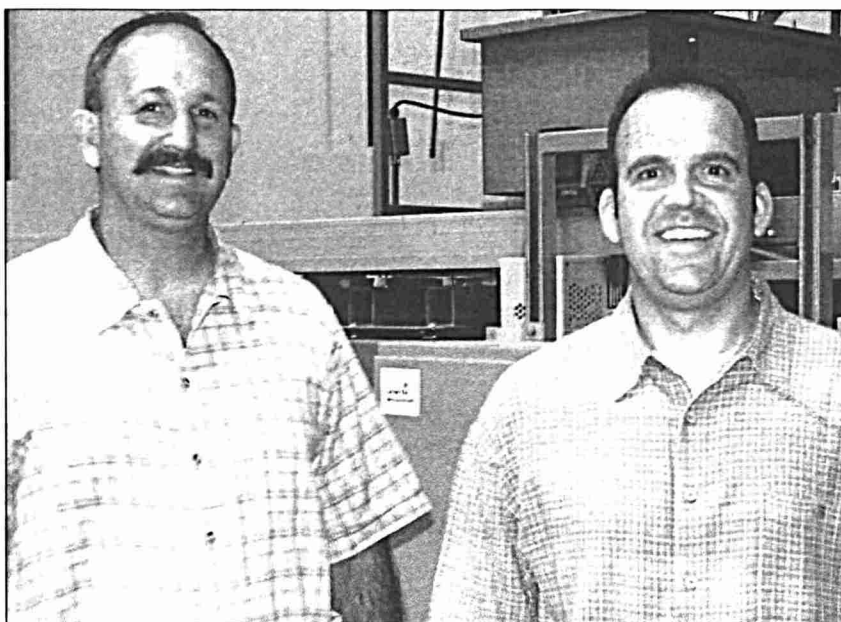
"Lemons will be a nice, big crop this year," Mr. Wilson said. "There's more lemons in District 1," which is Bakersfield, CA, and points north.

Mr. Wilson said that this year should mark a return to a more normal lemon crop. "If the [lemon crop] is holding up well, it goes into April," Mr. Wilson said. "Lemons had shape issues last year. This year they look nice."

Minneolas represent only a small part of Sunny Cove's business, and the company expects a light Minneola crop this year, Mr. Wilson said.

Sunny Cove is entering its third season as the West Coast citrus supplier for Green Giant Fresh, and the "program is definitely building," Mr. Wilson said.





At Sunny Cove Citrus are Keith Wilson and Roman Sowala.