

SunFed sticks with focus on conventional fruits, vegetables

By BRIAN GAYLORD

A few years ago Nogales, AZ-based SunFed launched an organic program for products such as grape tomatoes and green beans under its "SunFed Perfect Organics" label, but it has not become a major focus.

"We've been so successful with conventional," said Danny Mandel, the company's chief executive officer, adding that as a result organics have taken a back seat.

"SunFed" is the company's main label and its primary market is North America. In addition to grape tomatoes and green beans, the company grows and ships squashes, colored bell peppers, eggplant, American-type regular cucumbers and European cucumbers. Seasonally, SunFed carries watermelons, cantaloupes and honeydews.

SunFed product is grown in Mexico; its cucumbers and bell peppers are grown in shade-houses. SunFed "wants to be in the marketplace" as long as seasons will allow, Mr. Mandel said. That can mean up to nine months for squashes and cucumbers and six or seven months for bell peppers, he

said. New this year, SunFed is in the process of extending its melons to nine months of availability.

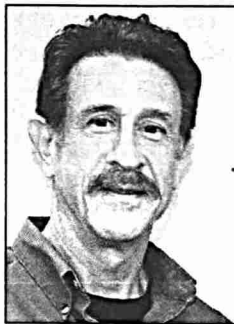
Every box of SunFed vegetables is packed in modified atmosphere packaging provided by Israel-based StePac L.A. Ltd.

StePac has "an inventory of 20 different engineered boxes," Mr. Mandel said. Though an order may take 45 to 60 days to arrive at SunFed, it's well worth the wait, he said.

For the past three years, third-party certifier Scientific Certification Systems has certified SunFed's fields and products under its "Flavor Rich" program, which combines the latest discoveries in flavor research to help seed companies, grower-shippers, retailers and distributors.

Customer response to SCS's auditing has been "excellent," Mr. Mandel said. Also, third-party auditor Primus Laboratories certifies SunFed in seven areas of food safety.

In the past two years SunFed has welcomed to its management team Jorge Gamez, chief financial officer; Alan Voll, vice president of sales and marketing; and Bill Swinford, chief operating officer.



Danny Mandel

