



Blue Diamond Expands In Sacramento

Opens World's Only Almond Innovation Center

By Blue Diamond

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SACRAMENTO, Calif., March 14, 2013 -- /PRNewswire/ -- "Every major innovation in almonds has come from Blue Diamond," explained Blue Diamond President and CEO, Mark Jansen, at the opening of the 6,500 square-foot Almond Innovation Center. "As a result, we are expanding our Sacramento headquarters to include the world's only research center dedicated to designing cutting-edge almond products."

Blue Diamond, a cooperative owned by over half of the state's almond growers, expects to increase new almond product sales growth five-fold over the next five years. "The new facility will be a showcase for initiating new almond product concepts for our consumer business and for the most innovative global food companies," added Jansen.

The success of Blue Diamond's investment in new snack products broke all sales records in the North American market in 2012. While Blue Diamond's snack almond business grew 21 percent, the Almond Breeze Aseptic Milk business jumped 21 percent and chilled Almond Milk sales skyrocketed 59 percent. Nut Thins cracker sales rose 28 percent. New snack products introduced early in 2013 include Roasted Coffee, Mocha and Caramel Macchiato flavored almonds, and three fruit-inspired flavors, Raspberry, Blueberry and Strawberry.

Likewise in the global ingredients business where almonds are used in a variety of foods, sales increased 35 percent and almonds remained in first place as the leading nut in new food products worldwide. Value-added revenues over the last two years are up 69 percent.

"Global almond product innovation has doubled Blue Diamond revenues in three years to well over \$1 billion in sales," said Jansen. "The robustness of U.S. almond shipments, even with this year's short supply, is directly attributable to new uses for almonds that our cooperative has created."

Today Blue Diamond received the Powering Innovation Capstone Award at SACTO's annual Salute to New Industry luncheon. The Capstone Awards recognize and celebrate leadership and excellence in driving growth and prosperity in the Sacramento Region.

The 2-billion pound California almond crop is valued at \$6 billion and generates nearly 50,000 jobs. New jobs and additional revenue will be returned to almond growing communities as production and value-added products continue to grow. Over 80 percent of the world's supply is grown in California. Almonds are the state's largest food export and the largest specialty crop export in America.

Photos of the Almond Innovation Center available on request: ckeyse@bdgrowers.com. Visit www.bluediamond.com or www.almondinsights.com.

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Blue Diamond opens Almond Innovation Center to develop new products

By Mark Glover

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Really, how many food products can you make with almonds?

Not nearly enough, according to officials of **Blue Diamond** Growers, which on Thursday formally opened its 6,500-square-foot Almond Innovation Center amid its sprawling complex of buildings along C Street in Sacramento.

The center is intended to lead Blue Diamond's efforts to develop new almond products. The company also laid down a welcome mat for global food companies that want to explore the potential benefits of almond products worldwide.

Mark Jansen, president and CEO of the 103-year-old Sacramento-based cooperative, called the facility "the world's only research center dedicated to designing cutting-edge almond products."

Working in comparatively humble labs, Blue Diamond research and development workers have been developing almond products that previous generations might have considered unlikely – everything from nondairy beverages to Blazin' Buffalo Wing-flavored almonds in a can.

John O'Shaughnessy, Blue Diamond's general manager for North American retail operations, said Thursday that all new branded almond products introduced over the past 10 years were produced by Blue Diamond.

He said the cooperative, owned by 3,000-plus growers, has introduced a dozen new almond products in the United States alone over the past six months. Another dozen are set to debut in the next six months.

Now, development will be done in a pristine center that resembles a hybrid of a massive hotel kitchen and a top-tier medical research facility. The center is stocked with exotic-looking devices to measure taste, **shelf life**, pH levels, flavor coatings and much more.

Blue Diamond's ability to churn out new almond-based products has served it well.

Last year, it amassed all-time record sales of more than \$1 billion. Year-over-year sales were up in multiple segments: snack almonds (up 21 percent), Nut Thins crackers (up 28 percent) and chilled almond milk (up 59 percent). Global sales of almond ingredients rose 35 percent.

Almonds are the state's No. 1 food export – with China and **Hong Kong** topping the destination list, importing 236 million pounds of California almonds in 2011-12 – and Jansen said the strength of almond shipments "is directly attributable to new uses for almonds that our cooperative has created."

New almond snacks introduced this year include coffee- and fruit-flavored products.

With a smile, Jansen said Thursday that the co-op's product expansion plans have been so aggressive that the company is upping the ante expressed in its iconic 1986 TV commercials featuring almond growers waist-deep in almonds saying, "A can a week, that's all we ask."

"Now," Jansen said, "we're asking for a can a week, a bag of Nut Chips and a carton" of almond milk.

Also evident on Thursday was the number of public officials on hand, expressing their gratitude that a Sacramento-headquartered enterprise employing nearly 1,000 here is adding to its local operations.

Attendees on hand for Thursday's ceremonies and a tour of the center included state Food and Agriculture Secretary Karen Ross, Sacramento Vice Mayor Angelique Ashby, Sacramento City Manager John Shirey and Sacramento Metro Chamber President and CEO Roger Niello.

In past years, public officials feared that Blue Diamond might move farther south into the heart of the Central Valley. Those concerns were raised in the fall of 2011 when Blue Diamond purchased 88 acres of land in Turlock and subsequently started building a major manufacturing and processing facility.

However, Blue Diamond spokeswoman Susan Brauner said Thursday that "we've always been committed (to Sacramento) ... Clearly, Blue Diamond has invested in building its global capabilities and located its Almond Innovation Center in Sacramento."

Brauner noted that limited room to expand some manufacturing operations in Sacramento prompted Blue Diamond to seek other places to handle that workload.

The first phase of the three-phase Turlock project is scheduled to be completed in May, with about 100 new hires and 200,000 square feet devoted to manufacturing and delivering almond products worldwide.

Blue Diamond also employs about 400 in Salida.

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