

Fresno County Farm Bureau

Friends of the Family Farm Sponsor

Woolf Farming and Processing: Building an enduring family farm

After returning from World War II, Jack Woolf, founder of Woolf Farming and Processing, began working for west side farming pioneer Russell Giffen. Woolf worked for Giffen for more than 30 years as his general manager.

In 1974, Giffen sold his properties in full compliance of Reclamation Law. More than 35 different family operations purchased 160-acre parcels from him. It was at this time Jack bought in to the farm with his six children. He was 57-years-old.

“Our mom and dad put all their chips on the table,” said Stuart Woolf, Jack’s son and co-owner of Woolf Farming and Processing. “As Giffen’s general manager, he had rare insight and opportunity to line up good land.”

In those days, farming on the west side consisted of mostly cotton, grain and melon, Jack chose to diversify and move away from the heavily subsidized crops by switching to specialty crops, such as processing tomatoes, almonds and pistachios. He was setting solid groundwork for the company to grow, while leaving a legacy in the process.

“The key was that he grew the right crops,” said Stuart.

Jack determined which crops were highly mechanized, had the best shelf stability after harvest, had high nutritional profiles and were unique to California.

Over the years, the operation has become vertically integrated. In 1988, the Woolf’s and John Harris partnered to build an almond processing plant huller/sheller that could process 8 million pounds of almonds. Soon after, the operation expanded to accommodate product from their neighbors as well.

A year later, they built a tomato processing facility in the middle of the most productive tomato growing region in the world, Fresno County.

“This is a family and company that want to grow, and grow globally.”

“The company is vertically integrated in key crops where California has a global competitive advantage,” said Stuart.

The goal for the family is to build an enduring family farming business. They focus on the long-term and are already transferring assets to the

next generation through trusts with the objective of sustainable growth and low debt. In addition, Woolf Farming and Processing relies on an outside board, which helps with strategic planning, governance and succession.

For the third generation to come work at the farm, they must have a minimum of a college degree and work experience outside of the family business. Once they begin working for the operation, they must report to non-family management. “They have a higher bar to cross than outsiders,” said Stuart.



**Three Generations of Woolf Farming (from L to R):
Stuart, Jack and Morgan Woolf.**

Woolf Farming and Processing is growing crops “that are nutritionally rich with great opportunities for growth” said Stuart. “This is a great time to be in this business with these particular crops. We’re feeding more people with fewer inputs...while chasing demand. That’s pretty hard to beat!”

“There is an incredible amount of opportunity in California, even with all the challenges,” said Stuart. “Feeding people is a great cause. We are feeding more [people] with fewer resources.”

The family’s business is unique because they are very focused on growth and development. “We don’t try to be all things to all people,” said Stuart. “We strive to be an employer of choice and typically pay employees at or above market wage. Additionally, there is an annual incentive program for employees, which is tied to commodity yields and cost.”

Woolf Farming and Processing also provides health benefits and a retirement program. The company experiences a very low turnover. “Most employees feel they have a personal relationship with the owners,” explained Stuart.

In the future, the business will continue to grow by analyzing all aspects of the operation and identifying new ways to become vertically integrated. The operation will also expand their crop base where water is more reliable. In addition, they will look for opportunities outside the United States. Ultimately, Woolf Farming and Processing will strive to be a global supplier of specialty products wherever they are grown.

In 2012, Woolf Farming and Processing became a *Friends of the Family Farm* sponsor because the company believes Farm Bureau is a good advocate for California agriculture.

“This is a family and company that want to grow, and grow globally,” said Stuart. “The company sells high nutrition, great products that are an important part of the food chain.”