

## MARKETRACK

# Los Angeles

*Economic climate having an impact on the vibrancy of Los Angeles produce scene; fuel costs, labor issues and food-safety scares factor into acknowledged 'stress in the market.'*

## Fresh new location, fresh new ideas, fresh new name for MCL

After 15 years of selling specialty, organic and conventional produce under the MCL Distributing, Inc. name, the Los Angeles-based grower, packer and logistics specialist has changed its name to MCL Fresh, Inc.

"MCL Distributing gave a limited impression of what we do here," David Lake, chief executive officer and cofounder of MCL Fresh, Inc., said in a press release. "We have never been just distributors; we have been involved in providing so much more for our customers, so it was time our name reflected that."

He continued, "Why MCL Fresh? We thought it reflected the 'fresh' way we approach our business and our future. We have 'fresh' growing operations, a 'fresh' new corporate facility, we have a 'fresh' new citrus division, RealSun Citrus, and we have re-invented the way organics will be sold in the marketplace – a 'fresh' idea, which will launch in the fourth quarter of 2008."

MCL Fresh continues to add acres of land to its growing operations throughout Mexico and Guatemala, as well as in San Diego and Santa Maria in California. These growing areas produce a variety of commodities including sugar snap peas, snow peas, chilies, peppers, green beans, squash, French beans, baby squash, Asian vegetables, organics and herbs. Even some additional specialty items are being grown experimentally for future consideration.

Located just minutes from the Los Angeles Wholesale Produce Market at 5555 East Olympic Blvd., MCL Fresh's corporate headquarters opened in November 2007. This is the firm's sixth new building since its founding. Adjacent to both north-south and east-west freeways, MCL Fresh is ideally located to be a logistics and consolidation hub in Los Angeles, the release said.

"We don't know how we ever lived without this facility," Robert Lake, MCL Fresh chief operating officer, said in the release. "Our last facility was state-of-the-art, but this one is light years ahead of its time in terms of capability, capacity, efficiency and location. This building solves two major problems customers have doing business in Los Angeles: food-safety assurance and traffic congestion. With two acres of off-street parking, 25 loading bays, and with 24/7 operating hours, we get trucks in and out quickly."

Sitting on over eight acres, the building touts over 145,000 square feet of 100 percent climate-con-



MCL Fresh has a new division, RealSun Citrus.

trolled staging and storage in multiple temperature zones, including an isolated -20 degrees Fahrenheit freeze section. From the instant MCL Fresh receives a delivery from anywhere in the world to the moment it is shipped out, at no time is the cold chain broken.

MCL Fresh also continues to lead the industry with its unequalled food-safety program. "We have spared no expense in creating what we feel will become the benchmark for other produce suppliers to aspire to," Clint Miguel, MCL Fresh's food-safety specialist, said in the release. "Our HACCP-based food-safety program starts with very strict guidelines that are followed throughout the product life cycle from growing, harvesting, receiving, storage, handling, packing, order staging and shipping. From our state-of-the-art trace back systems to onsite field inspections, our newly constructed value-added packing facility, and our expertly trained staff, we feel we do everything we can to ensure our products are safe for the consumer."

This year has also brought a new division to MCL Fresh: RealSun Citrus, which is headed by industry veteran Bill Rellos. With the state-of-the-art bagging equipment and established grower relationships throughout the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, South Africa and Chile, MCL Fresh has the capability to custom-pack conventional citrus, specialty citrus and even organic citrus. Several varieties of grapefruit, oranges, tangelos, limes, lemons, blood oranges, Cara Cara oranges and Seville oranges are available bagged or boxed. MCL

Fresh also offers complete lines of premium-grade product packed in strikingly designed decorative boxes.

MCL Fresh has also added new packing equipment to its already expansive value-added packing department. "This new equipment has expanded our capabilities, created redundancies, and increased efficiency," Robert Lake said in the release. Mesh and poly bagging, over wrapping, microwaveable in-bag technologies, micro-perforated films for extended shelf life, clamshells, private-label and custom-pack sizes are just some of the capabilities MCL Fresh offers.

The company's "fresh" approach is also being applied to its organics division. MCL Fresh is not new to the organics market, having started a dedicated organics division when it first opened its doors. The division is comprised of organic industry veteran Luke Patrino, Jr., and more recently organic veteran Paul Rabadan. The facility is fully QAI-audited to handle organic produce, with a significant portion of its massive storage area isolated and dedicated to organics.

"In the fourth quarter of 2008, we will be rolling out an exciting addition to our organics division. We think that it will have a huge impact on how the public perceives organic produce as well as what buyers will have available to them," David Lake said in the release.

MCL Fresh has grown from its founding in 1993 to become one of Los Angeles' leading growers and suppliers of fine specialty, organic and conventional produce to the retail and foodservice industries.