
2009
VALLEY FIG GROWERS
1959-2009

# Valley Fig Growers
# 1959 -2009

**50th Anniversary Celebration**

This book is dedicated to the fig grower/members,
employees, vendors and customers who have made
Valley Fig Growers a lasting success.

**Mission Statement**

Valley Fig Growers delivers innovative,
quality products and services to its customers
while providing superior quality returns to its members.

## Introduction

Two men, George C. Roeding and Jessie Clayton Forkner, are credited with establishing the commercial fig industry in California.

Prior to Roeding becoming interested in figs, the primary variety eaten was the dark purple Mission, so named for the missionaries who brought it to California. The world market, however, was dominated by the tasty, light colored Smyrna fig grown mainly in Turkey. Roeding brought cuttings of the Smyrna fig to California, but they did not grow well. Roeding discovered that the Smyrna fig needed male trees, called Capri figs, and a particular insect, a wasp, for pollination. Twenty years after Roeding brought the fig cuttings from Turkey and with a great deal of help from the California Department of Agriculture, the California fig industry was born. Roeding coined the name Calimyrna to identify the light golden fig variety as California's own.

Roeding partnered with Forkner, a farmer looking to make his fortune in California, to turn Fresno into the "Garden of Eden." Both men believed Fresno had the perfect climate for growing figs. In 1910, Forkner purchased 6,000 acres and planted figs. He blasted holes through the hardpan with dynamite so that tree roots could get through to the deep soil beneath. He later purchased 85 tractors from Henry Ford, who came to Fresno to see what was to become the largest fig orchard in the world.

Valley Fig Growers, an agricultural cooperative responsible for processing, packaging, marketing and selling their members' dried fig products, was established in 1959 by a large group of fig growers frustrated and disappointed with established industry prices. These growers purchased two packing plants, one owned by George Roeding, and became the largest handler of figs in North America.

The success of Valley Fig Growers lies in its ability to utilize an old product in an entirely new way that fits today's consumer buying habits. The cooperative's history of meeting challenges through innovation is evidenced in its diversified product line -- soft fig paste, fig slurry, concentrate, diced and sliced figs, fig balsamic vinegar, fig nuggets, organic fig products, and custom made fig ingredients. It has also been on the forefront of technology with the addition of state-of-the-art equipment, including the first anaerobic digester installed in a food processing facility in California. The digester converts process wastewater into methane gas which is then converted into electricity and utilized by the facility.

Today, figs are emerging stars in the "foodie" trend, appearing as popular ingredients in Western and European dishes as well as paired with wines, chocolate and gourmet cheeses. As the interest in eating whole foods continues to grow, and people of all ages look to tasty and healthful foods to bring depth and variety to their diets, figs will be the fruit of choice. Health enthusiasts, home cooks and culinary professionals throughout the country are turning to figs. Figs offer a convenient, sweet, richly flavored way to obtain dietary fiber, calcium, iron, potassium and health-promoting antioxidants.

Valley Fig Growers markets figs under the Blue Ribbon Orchard Choice, Blue Ribbon, and Sun-Maid brand names.

# An Enduring Legacy

## 1959

Valley Fig Growers is incorporated in the State of California on April 16, 1959 with the following signatories to the Articles of Incorporation: A. L. Funch, A. E. Montgomery, John E. Wheeler, Jr., Karl A. Grube, Paul Innes, Antoinette Lambetecchio, Frank Maas, V. E. Browne, Jr., H. E. Buck, H. Ikeda, Henry Mesple, John DeBenedetto, D. K. Grady, Violet Joy, Delores Hoy.

The first meeting of the Board of Directors is held on April 23, 1959. Harry Buck is elected interim Chairman and Dwight Grady, on loan from the California Fig Institute, is the first General Manager.

A new Board is later elected by the membership, 50 members in the northern district and 25 members in the southern district, and is seated in June 1959. The first Board consists of 5 members from the northern district, 7 members from the southern district, and 3 at-large members. A. E. Montgomery, a Merced area fig grower, is elected Chairman.

The original company offices are established at 64 North Fulton Street, Fresno, California.

Bonner Packing Company is engaged, for a fee of 10% of gross sales, to manage the processing, packing and marketing of Valley Fig Growers' member crops.

Valley Fig Growers purchases the Bonner Packing Company fig plant properties at East and California streets for a price of $450,000. A second acquisition, the Roeding Fig Company at 440 G Street and 600 G Street, is made from the stockholders of that corporation.

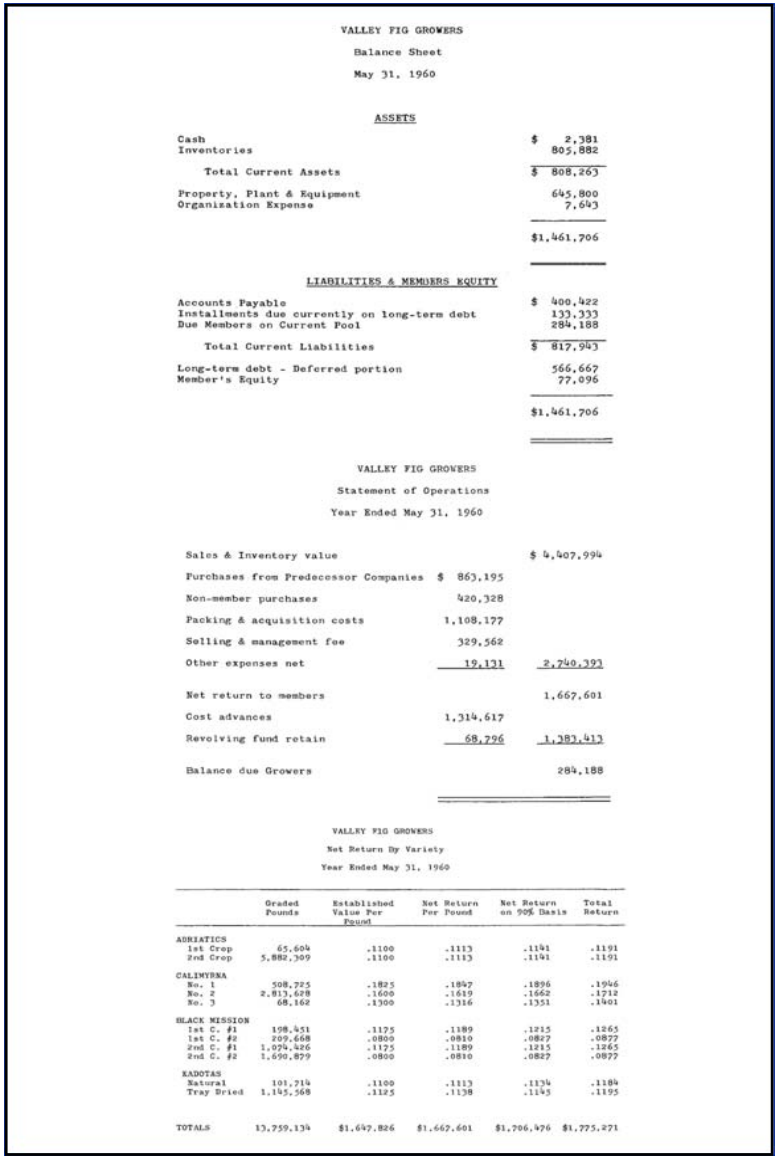
The 1959 California fig crop tonnage is estimated to be:

| | |
|---|---|
| Valley Fig Growers | 10,500 |
| California Fig Growers | 2,000 |
| Figs, Inc. | 2,800 |
| Roberts Fig Company | 2,640 |
| Producers Packing | 1,200 |
| Total tons | 19,140 |

Brokers for Valley Fig Growers report "quotations or sales of Turkish fig paste recently at from 13 to 13 1/2 cents per pound duty paid New York."

## 1960

The first Annual Meeting is held at the Hacienda Hotel. Mr. Davidson, the General Manager following Dwight Grady, reported, "the prices received for figs by the Valley Fig Growers' members for the past marketing season were the highest since the Korean war." He "attributed what he considered a very successful season to the fact that: 1) we have the best packing facilities in the industry and can ship orders on almost a moment's notice; 2) we have more pool cars and pool trucks moving to the larger markets in the United States and Canada than have any of the Association's competitors, because of the Association's selling agency arrangement with the California Packing Corporation and the availability of the Bonner pool car service; 3) we have the only cold storage facilities in the fig industry which enables the Association to render services to buyers by making shipment as late as September 30. This results in a competitive advantage that others are reluctant, or unable, to meet."



VALLEY FIG GROWERS

Balance Sheet

May 31, 1960

ASSETS

| | |
|---|---|
| Cash | $ 2,381 |
| Inventories | 805,882 |
| Total Current Assets | $ 808,263 |
| Property, Plant & Equipment | 645,800 |
| Organization Expense | 7,643 |
| | $1,461,706 |

LIABILITIES & MEMBERS EQUITY

| | |
|---|---|
| Accounts Payable | $ 400,422 |
| Installments due currently on long-term debt | 133,333 |
| Due Members on Current Pool | 284,188 |
| Total Current Liabilities | $ 817,943 |
| Long-term debt - Deferred portion | 566,667 |
| Member's Equity | 77,096 |
| | $1,461,706 |

VALLEY FIG GROWERS

Statement of Operations

Year Ended May 31, 1960

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sales & Inventory value | | $ 4,407,994 |
| Purchases from Predecessor Companies | $ 863,195 | |
| Non-member purchases | 420,328 | |
| Packing & acquisition costs | 1,108,177 | |
| Selling & management fee | 329,562 | |
| Other expenses net | 19,131 | 2,740,393 |
| Net return to members | | 1,667,601 |
| Cost advances | 1,314,617 | |
| Revolving fund retain | 68,796 | 1,383,413 |
| Balance due Growers | | 284,188 |

VALLEY FIG GROWERS

Net Return By Variety

Year Ended May 31, 1960

| | Graded Pounds | Established Value Per Pound | Net Return Per Pound | Net Return on 90% Basis | Total Return |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ADRIATICS | | | | | |
| 1st Crop | 65,604 | .1100 | .1113 | .1141 | .1191 |
| 2nd Crop | 5,882,309 | .1100 | .1113 | .1141 | .1191 |
| CALIMYRNA | | | | | |
| No. 1 | 508,725 | .1825 | .1847 | .1896 | .1946 |
| No. 2 | 2,813,678 | .1600 | .1619 | .1662 | .1712 |
| No. 3 | 68,162 | .1300 | .1316 | .1351 | .1401 |
| BLACK MISSION | | | | | |
| 1st C. #1 | 198,451 | .1175 | .1189 | .1215 | .1265 |
| 1st C. #2 | 209,668 | .0800 | .0810 | .0827 | .0877 |
| 2nd C. #1 | 1,074,426 | .1175 | .1189 | .1215 | .1265 |
| 2nd C. #2 | 1,690,879 | .0800 | .0810 | .0827 | .0877 |
| KADOTAS | | | | | |
| Natural | 101,714 | .1100 | .1113 | .1134 | .1184 |
| Tray Dried | 1,145,568 | .1125 | .1138 | .1145 | .1195 |
| TOTALS | 13,759,134 | $1,647,826 | $1,667,601 | $1,706,476 | $1,775,271 |

## 1961

The 1960 Turkish fig crop is estimated to be 55,000 tons, compared to a normal crop of 35,000 tons. Increasing imports present the new cooperative with issues as they rose from 3,266 tons in 1955-56 to an estimated 11,000 in 1960-61.

Questions plague the new cooperative, "Will the trade be able to use all of the new crop and will the trend continue going against us? If we have a full crop next fall, we must face the possibility that it may be necessary to price our figs closer to the prices quoted on Turkish, Portuguese and Greek figs in order to move the crop."

In a letter to the Secretary of Agriculture, the General Manager states that, "it (field labor cost) is well over $1.00 per hour in California agriculture, and over $1.75 per hour in the processing plants."

In a 1960 Board of Directors meeting, Chairman Montgomery, "raised the question of a potential market for figs in Japan." Mr. Hill answered, "the association did not have a surplus of package figs. There was not sufficient tonnage of the right kind of figs to go after additional markets."

## 1962

The 1961 crop is, "mostly sold at fig paste prices below the previous year. Small Mission figs are an issue. Biscuit bakers have turned almost completely away from Black figs." To compete with Portuguese paste, "Valley Fig Growers would have to drop their price on Black paste to the equivalent of 6 1/2 cents, sweat-box."

## 1963

Since the beginning of the cooperative venture, the Board has been responsible for "setting paste pricing" and the Chairman admonishes the board members to "consider its action on pricing policies confidential for at least a period of 48 hours."


**1963** *(continued)*

The per pound selling price of fig paste for the 1963 crop is established by the Board to be, "Calimyrna Paste - $.17, Adriatic and/or Kadota Paste - $.15 1/2, Bleached Black Paste - $.13, and Un-Bleached Black Paste - $.12."

Frank Domenik is hired to be the first non-member General Manager.

"Figlet" cartons are designed by the Elwood Robinson Agency in Los Angeles. The "Figlet" packages would contain smaller Mission figs that were being sold only as fig paste. Figlets were first test marketed in Southern California.

## RANCH STYLE CHOPS

The aroma of Grandmother's kitchen.

6 lean pork steaks or chops
Salt and pepper
6 California Dried Figs, sliced
1 tart apple, cored & sliced
2 tablespoons brown sugar
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1 tablespoon apple mint jelly

Place meat in large shallow baking dish. Season with salt and pepper. Top with dried figs and apples. Sprinkle with brown sugar and cinnamon. Dot each chop with a dab of jelly. Bake, covered, for 40 minutes at 350° F. Uncover and bake an additional 20 minutes. Makes 6 servings.

## FRESNO AMBROSIA

This is usually served as a dessert, but would fit into the menu as a salad -- especially for a buffet supper or a salad luncheon.

1 (3-oz) package cream cheese softened
1 cup dairy sour cream
1/2 cup flaked coconut
1 tsp powdered sugar
1/2 pound California Dried Figs, sliced
4 large oranges, peeled, cut into chunks

Whip cheese and sour cream with electric mixer until light and fluffy. Stir in coconut and sugar. Arrange layers of sliced figs and orange chunks in fruit bowl or individual sherbert dishes. Spoon topping over fruit. Makes 6 servings.

## 1964

Valley Fig Growers purchases California Fig Growers and Packers as an ongoing business at 2028 South Third Street, Fresno, California from Charlie Taylor for $250,000. The Blue Ribbon brand and trademark are included in the purchase.

Valley Fig Growers terminates the management services contract with the Bonner Packing Company.

Valley Fig Growers joins the Agricultural Council of California.

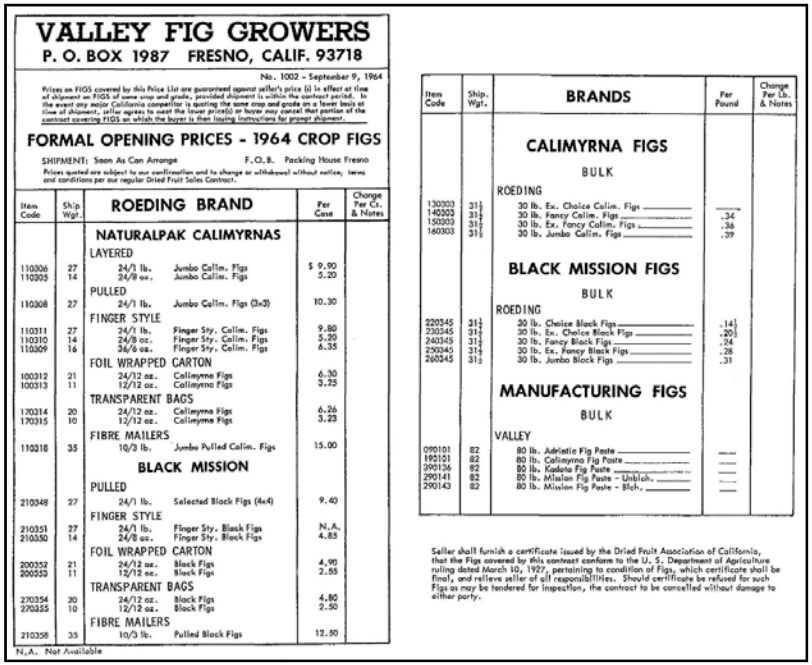
## 1965

The Valley Fig Growers offices and the packing operations at the Bonner plant, with the exception of the fig paste line, are moved to the California Fig Growers and Packers plant.

## 1966

Manager Frank Domenik comments early in the year that "sales were extremely slow and that even those customers who had made commitments were slow in taking out their orders. He attributed the general deterioration in the paste situation to several factors: 1) Availability of large quantities of low-priced foreign figs as in the past, 2) The high level of present Valley list prices, 3) Immediate sales by Valley's domestic competitors early in October at well below our list prices." In December he reports "that the largest user of fig paste had so far not purchased a single pound of new crop paste, but that negotiations were taking place. The sales of foreign paste in spite of the report of rain damage seemed to be close to last year at this time."

Blue Ribbon is designated as the Valley Fig Growers principle brand.



**VALLEY FIG GROWERS**
**P. O. BOX 1987 FRESNO, CALIF. 93718**

No. 1002 - September 9, 1964

Prices on FIGS covered by this Price List are guaranteed against seller's price (s) in effect at time of shipment on FIGS of same crop and grade, provided shipment is within the contract period. In the event any major California competitor is quoting the same crop and grade on a lower basis at time of shipment, seller agrees to meet the lower price(s) or buyer may cancel that portion of the contract covering FIGS on which the buyer is then issuing instructions for prompt shipment.

**FORMAL OPENING PRICES - 1964 CROP FIGS**

SHIPMENT: Soon As Can Arrange F.O.B. Packing House Fresno

Prices quoted are subject to our confirmation and to change or withdrawal without notice; terms and conditions per our regular Dried Fruit Sales Contract.

| Item Code | Ship. Wgt. | ROEDING BRAND | Per Case | Change Per Ct. & Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **NATURALPAK CALIMYRNAS** | | |
| | | LAYERED | | |
| 110306 | 27 | 24/1 lb. Jumbo Calim. Figs | $ 9.90 | |
| 110305 | 14 | 24/8 oz. Jumbo Calim. Figs | 5.20 | |
| | | PULLED | | |
| 110308 | 27 | 24/1 lb. Jumbo Calim. Figs (3x2) | 10.30 | |
| | | FINGER STYLE | | |
| 110311 | 27 | 24/1 lb. Finger Sty. Calim. Figs | 9.80 | |
| 110310 | 14 | 24/8 oz. Finger Sty. Calim. Figs | 5.20 | |
| 110309 | 16 | 36/6 oz. Finger Sty. Calim. Figs | 6.35 | |
| | | FOIL WRAPPED CARTON | | |
| 100312 | 21 | 24/12 oz. Calimyrna Figs | 6.30 | |
| 100313 | 11 | 12/12 oz. Calimyrna Figs | 3.25 | |
| | | TRANSPARENT BAGS | | |
| 170314 | 20 | 24/12 oz. Calimyrna Figs | 6.26 | |
| 170315 | 10 | 12/12 oz. Calimyrna Figs | 3.23 | |
| | | FIBRE MAILERS | | |
| 110318 | 35 | 10/3 lb. Jumbo Pulled Calim. Figs | 15.00 | |
| | | **BLACK MISSION** | | |
| | | PULLED | | |
| 210348 | 27 | 24/1 lb. Selected Black Figs (4x4) | 9.40 | |
| | | FINGER STYLE | | |
| 210351 | 27 | 24/1 lb. Finger Sty. Black Figs | N.A. | |
| 210350 | 14 | 24/8 oz. Finger Sty. Black Figs | 4.85 | |
| | | FOIL WRAPPED CARTON | | |
| 200352 | 21 | 24/12 oz. Black Figs | 4.90 | |
| 200353 | 11 | 12/12 oz. Black Figs | 2.55 | |
| | | TRANSPARENT BAGS | | |
| 270354 | 20 | 24/12 oz. Black Figs | 4.80 | |
| 270355 | 10 | 12/12 oz. Black Figs | 2.50 | |
| | | FIBRE MAILERS | | |
| 210358 | 35 | 10/3 lb. Pulled Black Figs | 12.50 | |

N.A. Not Available

| Item Code | Ship. Wgt. | BRANDS | Per Pound | Change Per Lb. & Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **CALIMYRNA FIGS** | | |
| | | BULK | | |
| | | ROEDING | | |
| 130303 | 31½ | 30 lb. Ex. Choice Calim. Figs | ____ | |
| 140303 | 31½ | 30 lb. Fancy Calim. Figs | .34 | |
| 150303 | 31½ | 30 lb. Ex. Fancy Calim. Figs | .36 | |
| 160303 | 31½ | 30 lb. Jumbo Calim. Figs | .39 | |
| | | **BLACK MISSION FIGS** | | |
| | | BULK | | |
| | | ROEDING | | |
| 220345 | 31½ | 30 lb. Choice Black Figs | .14½ | |
| 230345 | 31½ | 30 lb. Ex. Choice Black Figs | .20½ | |
| 240345 | 31½ | 30 lb. Fancy Black Figs | .24 | |
| 250345 | 31½ | 30 lb. Ex. Fancy Black Figs | .28 | |
| 260345 | 31½ | 30 lb. Jumbo Black Figs | .31 | |
| | | **MANUFACTURING FIGS** | | |
| | | BULK | | |
| | | VALLEY | | |
| 090101 | 82 | 80 lb. Adriatic Fig Paste | ____ | |
| 190101 | 82 | 80 lb. Calimyrna Fig Paste | ____ | |
| 290136 | 82 | 80 lb. Kadota Fig Paste | ____ | |
| 290141 | 82 | 80 lb. Mission Fig Paste - Unblch. | ____ | |
| 290143 | 82 | 80 lb. Mission Fig Paste - Blch. | ____ | |

Seller shall furnish a certificate issued by the Dried Fruit Association of California, that the Figs covered by this contract conform to the U. S. Department of Agriculture ruling dated March 10, 1927, pertaining to condition of Figs, which certificate shall be final, and relieve seller of all responsibilities. Should certificate be refused for such Figs as may be tendered for inspection, the contract to be cancelled without damage to either party.


**1967** - The first advertising program is developed by Elwood Robinson Agency which includes: 1) establishment of the Blue Ribbon brand as symbolic of California's finest figs, 2) use of point of purchase material applicable for use by fig bar manufacturers on a cooperative basis with the Dried Fig Advisory Board, 3) cooperating with Sun-Maid and Sunsweet on point of purchase materials, 4) encouraging customers through various devices to promote the product as illustrated by material and effort being put forth by Realemon-Puritan Company on fig juice, 5) special mailing to institutional and other bulk users to promote interest, and 6) mailing to Japanese baking industry members to ascertain amount of interest present as well as to promote further inquiry."

Bob McAuley, the son-in-law of A. E. Montgomery and an automobile dealer from Merced, is elected as Chairman.

Valley Fig Growers is profiled in a color television interview by KMJ-TV in September 1967.

Mr. Domenik reports to the Board "that most outlets for fig paste had already been filled in one way or another, but that the largest user of fig paste had not yet purchased a single pound of new crop paste."

**1968**

The Board of Directors relinquishes control of fig paste pricing to the General Manager.

**1969**

Frank Domenik resigns and Bill Corbett, Sales Manager, is named General Manager.

Bill Corbett, in his new position of general manager, says "Our sales position is the best ever and our inventory is essentially committed with the exception of Adriatics." He later notes, "Paste shipments are roughly 1,000 tons behind a year ago, principally due to extreme heavy shipments during the early part of the 1968-69 season, and a strike at National Biscuit Company for the past six weeks."

**1970**

Sun-Maid, Sunsweet, and Valley Fig Growers combine efforts in a non-profit cooperative known as Sunland Marketing to sell, promote and distribute products of all three companies.

Major modifications of the paste and slice processing lines are completed to modernize the lines and complete the move from the Bonner plant.

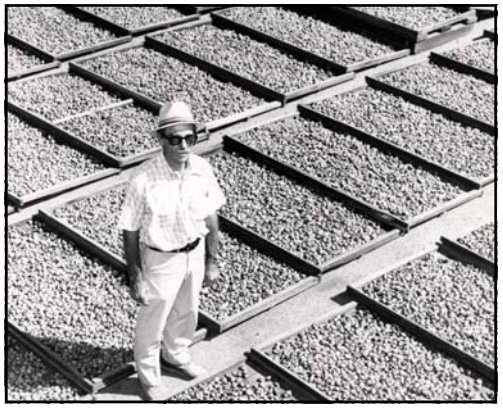
**1971**

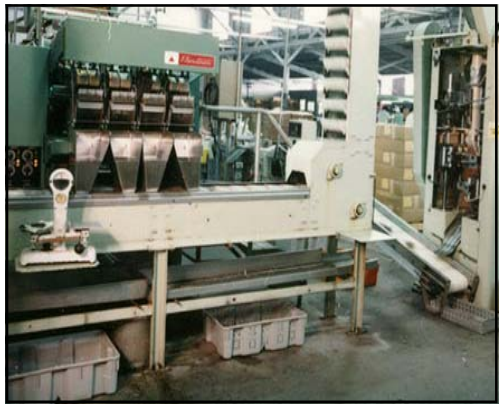
The old Bonner plant, used solely for storage, is demolished. The location later becomes the site of the wastewater pre-treatment facility.

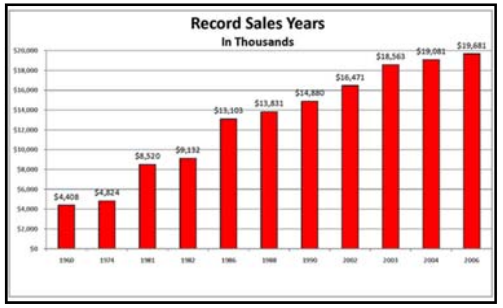
**1972**

An estimated 15-25% of the 1972 crop is lost due to a freeze in March.

The property at 419 G Street, an old building and parking lot, part of the Roeding Fig purchase, is sold.









**1973**

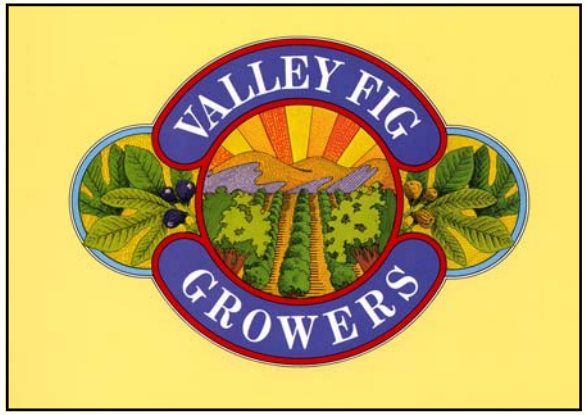
The carton line is automated with an automatic filler and carton inserter.

**1974**

Sales reach an all-time high of $4,824,282, the first of many record years.

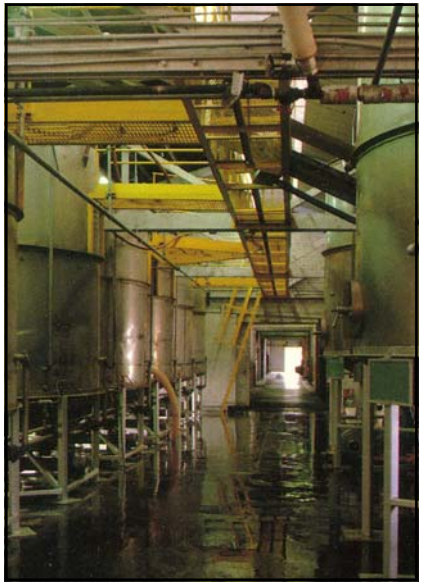
**1975**

Sunland Marketing is dissolved. Sunsweet and Diamond Walnut Growers join together and form Diamond/ Sunsweet, a new organization. Sun-Maid and Valley Fig Growers continue to market jointly under the name of Sunland Marketing.





**Top from left**: 1976 VFG brochure cover, 1977 BR Figlets bag package.
**Bottom from left**: 1978 plant tour, 1976 concentrate equipment modifications, 1979 Bill Corbett and Jennifer Mathis



**1976** - Major modifications to processing and packing equipment are made with the addition of new receiving equipment, a vertical form and fill bag machine, concentrate equipment, and boiler modifications enabling the use of the cheaper natural gas or diesel. The capacity to manufacture raisin concentrate is tripled.

The Manager notes in a Board of Directors meeting, "Prices on Calimyrna figs are increased 35-40% and are sold well. Paste sales increased with the average price being $.45 per pound, 4-5 cents higher than the previous year. All of the 1976 crop paste figs were committed. It was a good year."

**1977 -** French labeling is added to packages destined for sale in Canada.

Valley Fig Growers begins processing prunes for Sun-Maid and Superior Farms, and apricots for Sun-Maid.

**1978 -** Sun-Maid apricot processing line and scales are installed to handle the apricot production begun the previous year.

Modifications are made to the G Street warehouse, the old Roeding plant, to handle larger trucks.

Rain during the Labor Day weekend reduces the 1978 California fig crop by about 25%.

**1979 -** Sun-Maid acquires Henrietta Rancho Products and Valley Fig Growers is contracted to pack 1,500-2,000 tons of prunes in bulk.

**1980 -** Scot Kvamme, formerly a Henrietta Rancho employee, comes from Sun-Maid to supervise prunes and raisin concentrate production.

The raisin concentrate plant is operating at capacity 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, and the Henrietta Rancho Products production lines are moved to Valley Fig Growers to expand production capacity tenfold. A five year production contract is made with Sun-Maid.

Two new warehouses are completed, one dry storage and the other cold storage.

**1981 -** An agency agreement between Valley Fig Growers and Sun-Diamond Growers is completed and the the Sun-Diamond Growers president, Frank Light, becomes President of Valley Fig Growers.

The Sun-Maid trademark is licensed from Sun-Maid Growers of California.

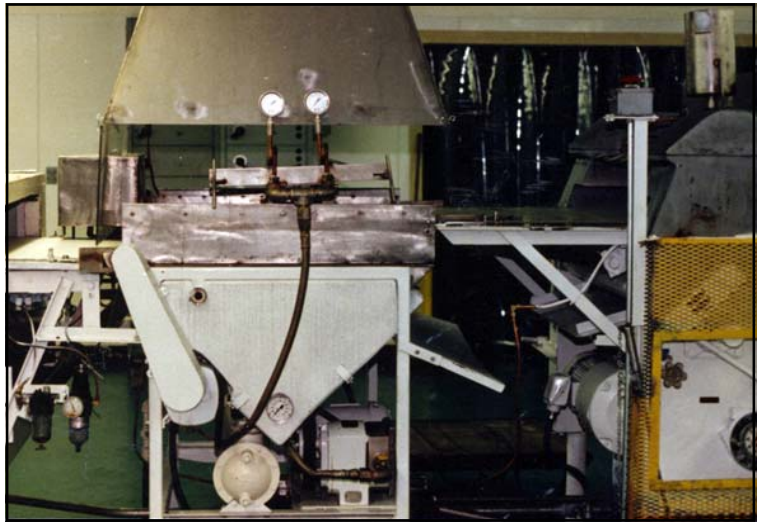
Fruit nuggets are developed by Gary Jue at Sun-Diamond Growers to reduce the dried fig surplus.

**1982 -** Valley Fig Growers acquires a share of Sun-Land Products of California, a wholly owned subsidiary of Sun-Diamond Growers.

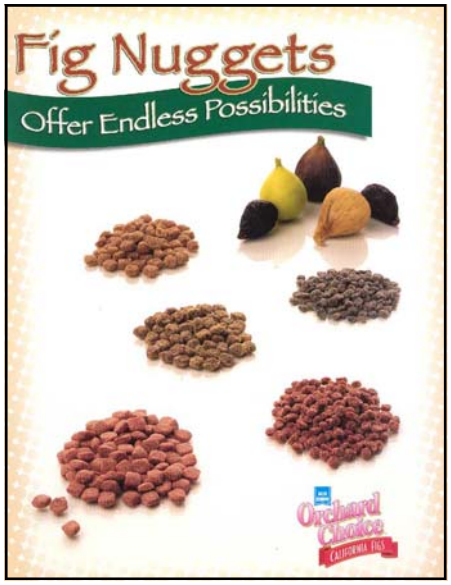
The first fruit nugget extrusion line is installed for the production of extruded fig nuggets. The main component of the new line is a cookie extruder, a used piece of equipment modified to produce nuggets from fig paste, which is very difficult to extrude.

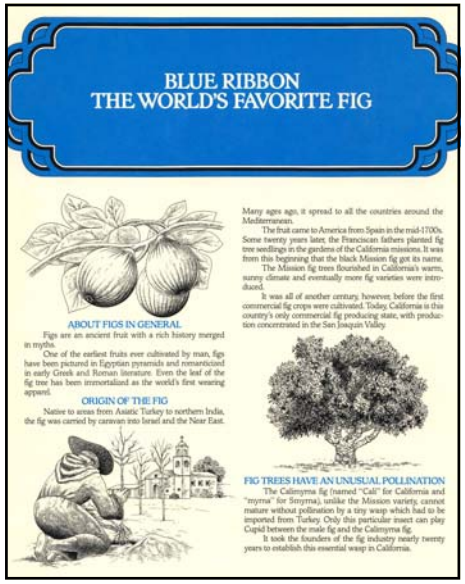
**1980** - Aerial view of the Valley Fig Growers plant

**1980** - Valley Fig Growers warehouses



**1982** - Nugget extruder



**1983** - Production of fig juice, previously marketed by ReaLemon, Loma Linda and Safeway, is completed and the Sunsweet labeled retail product is introduced in Florida and Los Angeles markets. Although reception was good in Florida, it was eventually pulled from the market.

The Valley Fig Growers grower store is established to sell fig products to local patrons.

**1984** - Bill Corbett retires as Vice President and Jennifer Mathis, Controller, is promoted to fill the vacancy. Mike Emigh moves to Valley Fig Growers from Sun-Maid to be Vice President of Finance.

Valley Fig Growers, with the assistance of Sun-Diamond, develops Nutrafruit (deseeded) and California Fruit Mix (seeded) fig fillings to be used as a fat replacement.

**1985** - Mr. Light reports "that paste sales are slow and there is a severe inventory problem of paste figs."

Gary Jue, Manager of Quality Control & Research, moves from Sun-Diamond and assumes the duties of Costas Athanassiadis, who retires and returns to his home land, Greece.

First commercial orders of fig nuggets are sold to USDA to help alleviate fig paste surplus.

**1986** - Barry Kriebel, Senior Vice President and Interim Chief Operating Officer replaces Frank Light as President after accounting issues within Sun-Diamond Growers are discovered. Jennifer Mathis was appointed to the position of President three months later. Sun-Diamond Growers is reorganized as a service organization providing sales, marketing, customer service, distribution, government affairs, R & D, and IT services.

**1986** (*continued)*

Fig powder is developed for sale.

Datelets (extruded dates and figs) are introduced by Sun-Diamond Growers for sale to retail consumers.

**1987**

Blue Ribbon fig packages are redesigned.

President Mathis travels to fig producing areas in Portugal, Spain, and Greece to visit with competitors and potential suppliers.

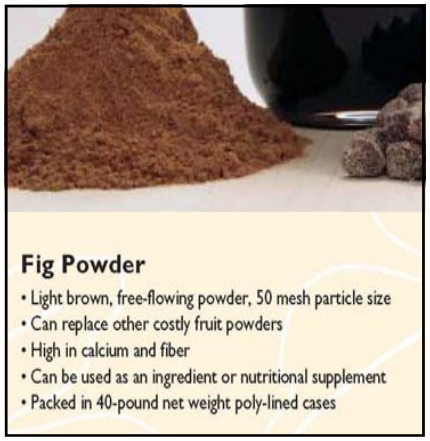
De-seeding rolls are purchased and installed to produce seed-free paste.

Two new paste grinders are purchased and the entire paste line is modernized and upgraded.

A Quality Bonus Program is established to incent members to grow and deliver a quality product.

**1988**

A second back-up processor is installed on the whole-fig processing line to increase capacity.



**1988** (*continued)*

Gary Jue is promoted to the position of Director of Industrial Sales and Technical Services.

**1989**

Kellogg purchases fig & prune nuggets for Mueslix, a muesli type cereal, for national distribution. The cereal product was discontinued in December.

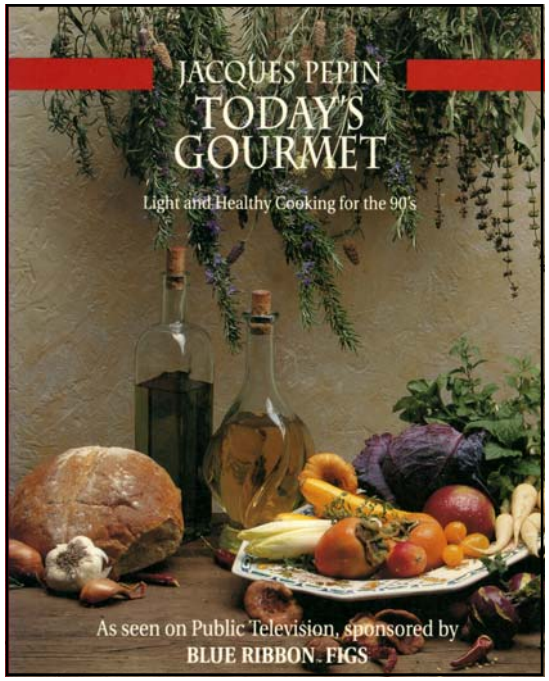
R&D work begins on the creation of a special softened fig paste product which would alleviate handling problems for small customers.

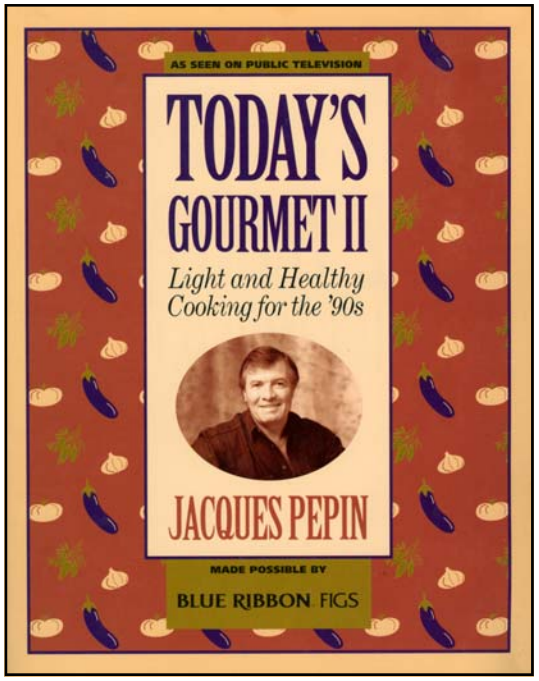
Early season rains cause minor damage to Calimyrna and Mission figs.

Mexican Tray Dried Kadota figs begin arriving in the Hong Kong market, depressing prices for California figs.

**1990**

A new warehouse and sampling and grading buildings are constructed. State-of-the-art sampling and size-grading equipment is installed.




**1990** *(continued)*

A nationally broadcast PBS cooking program, "Today's Gourmet", starring the renowned chef, Jacques Pepin, is co-sponsored with Sun-Maid. There were 26 programs produced over a three year period.

Exports of Calimyrna figs to Japan begin.

A blended fig concentrate is developed using a blend of varieties of figs versus the standard Mission fig concentrate.

The Valley Fig Growers marketing department is established.

Extreme cold at the end of the year, with low temperatures in the 20's, damages stored fiber cases in the fiber storage warehouse due to frozen fire sprinkler pipes. Coincidentally, this same freeze alters the growth of large size Mission figs from the 1991 crop forward.

**1991**

New Figlet packaging, featuring a coupon for the "Today's Gourmet" cookbook, is introduced.

The G Street warehouse is demolished.

**1992**

President Mathis and Gary Jue travel to Turkey to meet with competitive Turkish fig packers.

Exports of Mission figs to Japan begin.

**1993**

An improved blueberry flavored fruit nugget is developed for the hot cereal industry and added to the current list of products.

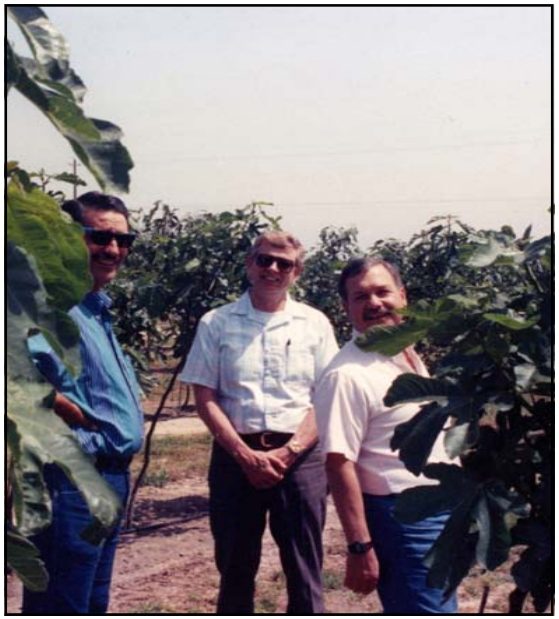
**1994**

Linda Cain joins Valley Fig Growers as Director of Marketing.

The first trip by Valley Fig Growers staff to Tokyo, Japan is made to meet with the Japan agent and customers to review the Japanese fig market. The Japanese market for dried figs is growing and there is potential for additional growth if a quality product could be shipped.

An improved strawberry flavored nugget is introduced.

The Valley Fig Growers corporate video is produced and targeted to retail, industrial, and Japanese (dubbed) audiences. The video is later added to the Valley Fig Growers website with a link to YouTube.



**1995**

Blue Ribbon logo is redesigned and updated to Blue Ribbon Orchard Choice.

The first application for Market Access Program (MAP) funds to promote figs in export markets is made. The Japanese trade wants MAP funds used for a sampling program to increase awareness of figs in Japan.

The first Baking Seminar, sponsored by Valley Fig Growers, Sun-Maid, and Diamond Walnut, is held in Japan featuring well known pastry chef, Jim Dodge.

**1996**

"Cobbler" fruit bars are introduced by Nabisco and, subsequently, other bar manufacturers. These bars compete directly with Fig Newton Bars and, despite efforts to convince the manufacturers, contain no fig paste.

Nabisco reports they did not meet their 1995 sales forecast and are behind forecast for 1996. They believe the cobblers, Snackwells, and other new items have cannibalized the Fig Newton product line. They state that Valley Fig Growers should not wait for them to order fig paste this year.

**1996** *(continued)*

Imports of fig paste increase, mostly from Turkey. The Turkish economy is suffering and the lira is very weak against the dollar.

The corporate video and the Japanese trade brochure win awards at the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives Information Fair.

Chairman Robert McAuley resigns after serving for 29 years. Barry McAuley is selected to succeed his father.

Valley Fig Growers launches www.valleyfig.com on the world wide web.

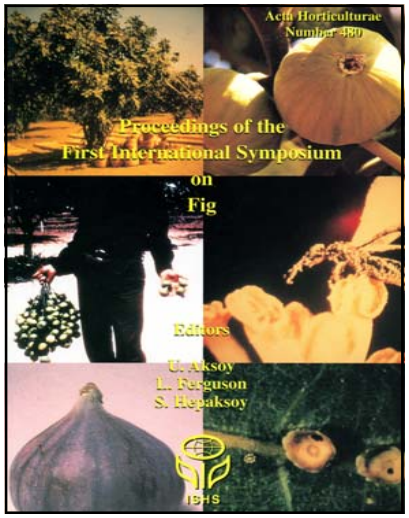
**1997**

Valley Fig Growers installs the only hollow fig removal equipment in the industry.

A new fig nugget line is built and installed with a state-of-the-art extruder and coating application system.

Michael Emigh is appointed President of Valley Fig Growers.

Gary Jue attends First International Symposium on Fig in Izmir, Turkey.





**1998**

The first container of organic figs from Cardwell Ranch in Chowchilla is shipped to Japan.

Linda Cain is promoted to Vice President, Marketing, Gary Jue to Vice President, Industrial Sales & Technical Services, and Scot Kvamme to Operations Manager.

**1999**

Valley Fig Growers works with the Culinary Institute of America and the Culinary Center to develop recipes that feature figs.

The first Japan Confectionery Association Seminar sponsored by Valley Fig Growers is held in Tokyo.

First sales of figs are made to a Singapore customer.

Sun-Maid packaged bags are redesigned as stand up resealable pouches and a new Stand Up Pouch (SUP) horizontal form and fill packaging machine is installed with new electronic scales.

**2000**

Sun-Diamond Growers is dissolved.

Sun-Maid is engaged to handle all domestic retail sales, previously performed by Sun-Diamond Growers.

New information systems designed to operate all Valley Fig Growers' business segments are installed.

Valley Fig Growers exhibits for the first time in mainland China at the Asia 2000 food show in Beijing, China.

**2001**

Valley Fig Growers exhibits for the first time at the Winter Fancy Food West Coast Show in San Francisco, California and the Natural Products Expo in Anaheim, California.

**2001** *(continued)*

President Emigh attends the Second International Symposium on Fig held in Caceres, Spain. Customers in Germany and fig packers in Greece and Turkey were also visited.

The first sale of figs are made to Thai and Indonesian customers.

Kraft Foods purchases Nabisco and becomes Valley Fig Growers' new largest customer.



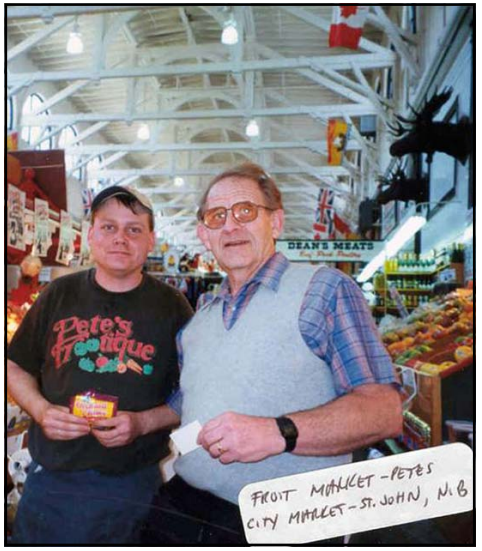
**2002**

Valley Fig Growers installs two state-of-the-art high efficiency boilers to provide steam and hot water to the processing lines.

The California Energy Commission awards a $476,000 PIER Grant to Valley Fig Growers for the construction of a wastewater pre-treatment facility.

Marvin Primack, MD is honored for his dedicated service to the Association and bestowed the honorary title of "Valley Fig Growers Worldwide Ambassador of Figs."

The first sale of figs are made to Korean and Chinese customers.




**2003**

Jim Gargiulo is appointed to the position of Vice President, Finance and Secretary/Treasurer. He is the fourth member of the current management team to have previous Sun-Maid experience.

Valley Fig Growers enters into a long term contract with the Fleischmann's Vinegar Company to produce a proprietary juice product used to make balsamic vinegar.

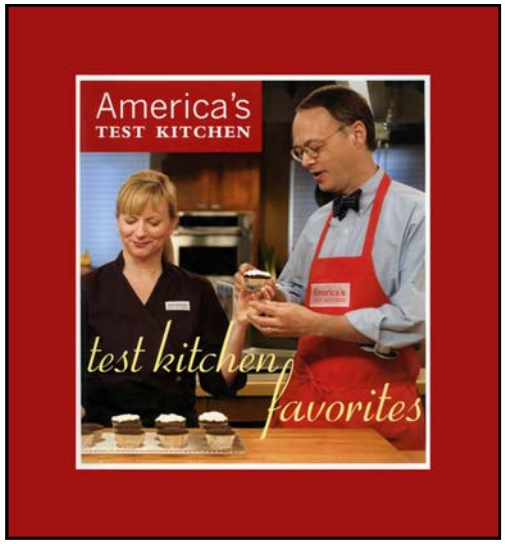

BEST

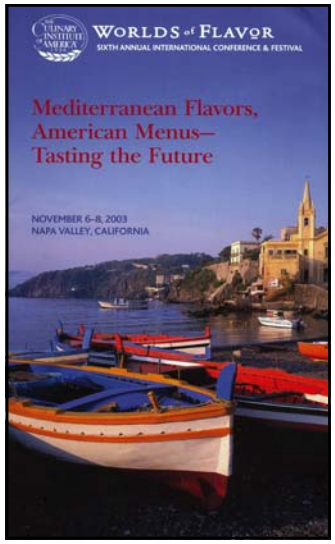
**2003** *(continued)*

Valley Fig Growers begins sponsorship of Public Broadcasting Systems' (PBS) Chris Kimball's popular show, *America's Test Kitchen*.

California International Market Promotions of Agriculture (CIMPA) Grant awarded to Valley Fig Growers to promote figs in Japan.

Participation begins in the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) Worlds of Flavor program in St. Helena, California. California figs exposure to world renowned chefs and culinary experts begins in earnest.




**2004**

The first state-of-the-art electronic laser sorting machine is installed, the only such installation in a fig plant anywhere in the world.

Paul Mesple, son of a Valley Fig Growers' founder, is elected Chairman.

Valley Fig Growers participates in the first annual Fig Fest sponsored by the California Fig Advisory Board.

Two new fig based cookbooks are published by close friends, Marie Simmons' *fig heaven* and Sondra Bernstein's *the girl & the fig cookbook*.

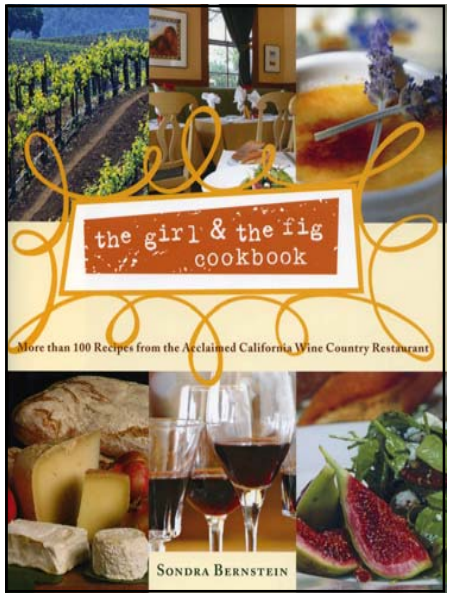

**2005**

The wastewater pre-treatment facility is completed and dedicated by Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, A. J. Yates. This facility is the first of its kind for use in a food processing environment and includes a state of the art 70kV micro-turbine generator fueled by the methane gas produced.

Chairman Paul Mesple represents Valley Fig Growers at the Third International Symposium on Fig held in Vilamoura, Algarve, Portugal.


Gourmet Food Samples*
Fresh and Dried Figs
Fig Tree Sales
Amazing Recipes
Book Signing
by Marie Simmons, Fig Heaven Cookbook
Clifford the Big Red Dog
Face Painting
Celebrating A Valley Treasure
FIG FEST
Saturday, August 14
9 AM to 1 PM
Vineyard Farmer's Market
Shaw and Blackstone in Fresno
*Braun's Gourmet Ice Cream, Campagnia, Citron, Echo, Elbow Room, Erna's Elderberry House, Love & Garlic, Slates, The Vineyard, Whole Foods Market
Sponsored by California Fig Advisory Board & Slow Food Madera


fig heaven


the girl & the fig cookbook
More than 100 Recipes from the Acclaimed California Wine Country Restaurant
Sondra Bernstein

**2005** *(continued)*

Valley Fig Growers begins a continuing relationship with a co-packer to pack tray packs off site.

The first sale of figs is made to a Taiwanese customer.

**2006**

Two new products are introduced, a Fig Balsamic Vinegar and Fig Slurry, which are used as ingredients in salad dressing.

Retail package graphics are redesigned.


Valley Fig Growers is honored for its environmental contribution to the community when the Fresno City Council proclaimed March 28, 2006 as "Valley Fig Growers Day" in the city of Fresno.


**2007**

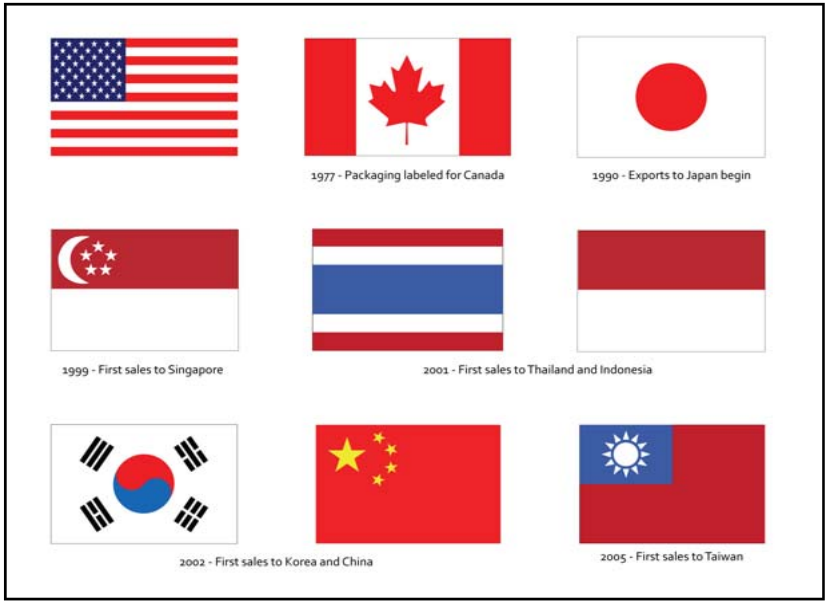
Again at the forefront of technology, a state-of-the-art optical sorter is installed to enhance the electronic sorting of figs. With the introduction of the optical sorter, in addition to the laser sorter, virtually all hand sorting has been eliminated.


**2008**

Mike Emigh and Linda Cain accompany the California Secretary of Agriculture, A.G. Kawamura, on a trade mission to Cuba.

Sponsorship begins of the Public Broadcasting System's (PBS) popular show, *Joanne Weir's Cooking Class*.


SUN-MAID
CALIMYRNA FIGS
SUN-MAID
MISSION FIGS
Orchard Choice
MISSION FIGLETS





**2008** *(continued)*

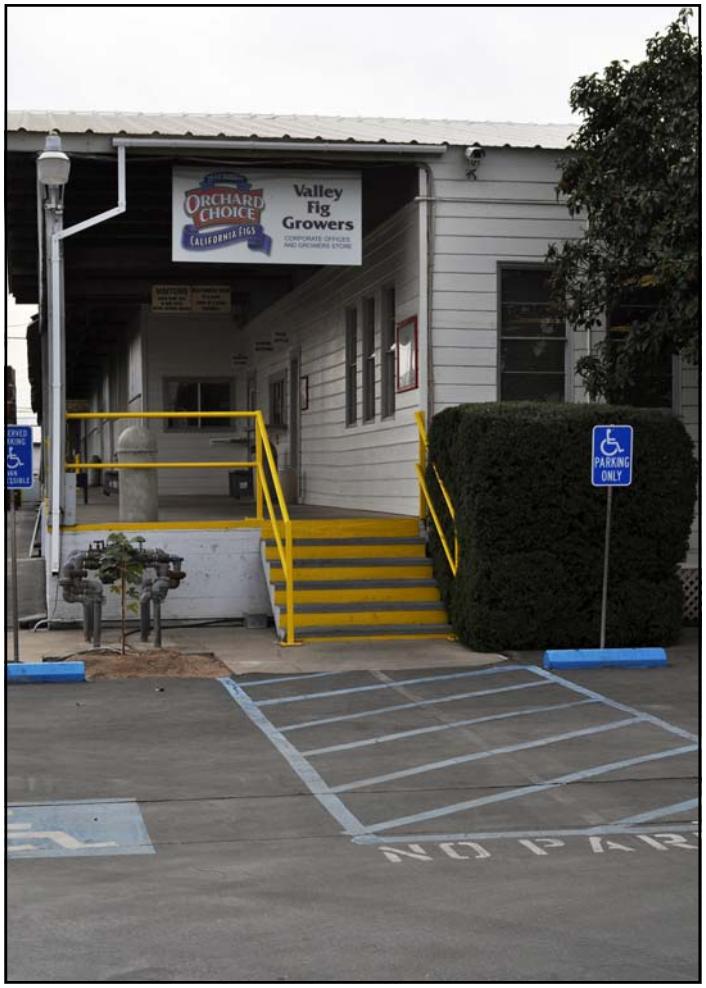
E-mail and internet marketing efforts are ramped up and systematic e-mail blasts begin.

Member equity is completely restructured. The existing revolving fund is retired and a new base capital plan is established to better address future capital needs.

**2009**

Begin sponsorship of PBS *Cook's Country,* hosted by Chris Kimball.

Valley Fig Growers enlarges its customer base by becoming active on Twitter and FaceBook.




**December 4, 2009**

Valley Fig Growers 50th Anniversary Celebration is held in Fresno, California.

We acknowledge the following partners for their support of
the Valley Fig Growers 50th Anniversary Celebration.








**VALLEY FIG GROWERS**

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**Web: www.valleyfig.com**

## Board of Directors

**Paul Mesple, Chairman**
**Peter Van Vleet, Vice Chairman**
**Maury DeBenedetto, Jr.**
**Richard DeBenedetto**
**Jim Wegley**

## Management

**Mike Emigh, President**
**Gary Jue, Vice President, Ingredient Sales & Technical Support**
**Linda Cain, Vice President, Marketing & Retail Sales**
**Jim Gargiulo, Vice President, Finance**
**Scot Kvamme, Operations Manager**