

Bifulco's Four Seasons Cold Storage expands facility

By TIM LINDEN

By the peak of the South American mango deal in the fall each year, Bifulco's Four Seasons Cold Storage facilities in Pittsgrove, NJ, would be running short on space. The same thing would happen in the spring when the Chilean grape deal reached its peak.

However, that shouldn't be a problem again for at least several more years as the company increased the size of its facility by more than 50 percent and now has more than 75,000 square feet of room in which to negotiate.

"Every year the various importers that use us get a little bigger and bring in a little more product, and so it was time for us to expand as well," said Mickey Bifulco, president of the operation, which is one of four firms run by Mr. Bifulco and his two brothers, Bert III and Jerry.

The brothers have farming and transportation operations as well and are the third generation of the Bifulco family in the produce business. "We all work together and run the operations together," said Mickey. "We are a close family and work well with each other."

Bifulco's cold storage facility specializes in providing services for importers in the surrounding area that bring product in from all over the world. At this time of the year, mangos from South America take up the lion's share of the available space.

Mr. Bifulco said that the expansion efforts include a 6,000-square-foot refrigerated repacking room as well as 23,000 more square feet of cold storage. The new cold storage square footage connects to a 5,000-square-foot forced-air refrigeration room

that also features three loading docks equipped with dock seals. The new rooms add eight more loading docks that seal.

"I'm really excited about our increase in loading docks with seals," said Mr. Bifulco. "The ability to load and unload without breaking the cold chain is very important."

He said that the company now has 29 loading docks, 11 of which offer that service. With food safety audits and concerns being increasingly important, Mr. Bifulco said that the ability to unload or load a truck without a rise in temperature of the product in question is very important.

"And if the product needs to be repacked or a pallet broken down, we can do it under refrigeration also," he added.

Mr. Bifulco said that the company's commitment to food safety was illustrated by its latest audit from Primus-Labs. "We received a 96 percent, which is a 'Superior' rating," he said. "We've had an active program with Primus for six years. This spring we also completed our organic certification, which we are very proud of."

As a course of daily operation, U.G.M. Transport, the company's transportation wing, heads to the ports in the area to pick up imported fruit and bring it back to the Pittsgrove facility. From there it is stored and then shipped up and down the East Coast.

"I think our location is very important," said Mr. Bifulco. "Even a late order can be delivered to Philadelphia, Maryland, northern New Jersey or New York or even Boston. We do business all over, but I'd say northern New Jersey or New York is where we do the most."

Mr. Bifulco said that U.G.M. transport has 15 trailers of its own with two more on the way

along with six trucks.

In addition, the company utilizes independent operators that have trucks but no trailers. "During the day, we run to the ports, and at night, we run up

and down the coast."

Mr. Bifulco said that the firm specializes in less-than-full-load deliveries.

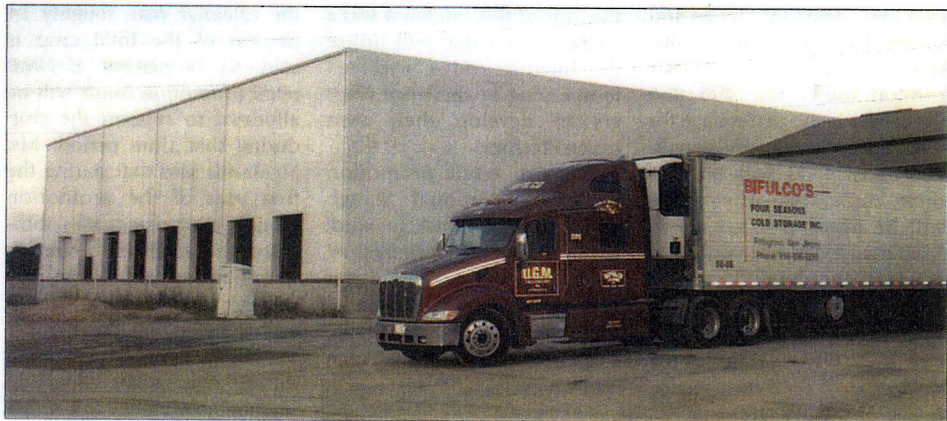
"We run every night so importers know they can call

in an order for even a couple of pallets late in the day and it will get where it is supposed to go," he concluded.

And will get there without breaking the cold chain.



The new and currently functioning 6,400-square-foot repacking and restyling room at Bifulco's Four Seasons Cold Storage. It features USDA-approved light fixtures with a 55-foot candle level for better product visibility. It is also conveniently connected to a 3,000-square-foot supply room. (Photo courtesy of Bifulco's)



The newest addition to the Bifulco's Four Seasons Cold Storage complex is an 18,000-square-foot, fully racked cold storage room. It features racking three high and direct access to the 6,000-square-foot forced air room. Also, it has eight sealed loading doors to maintain temperature during shipping and receiving. This addition should be completed and functioning the third week of October. (Photo courtesy of Bifulco's)