

THE PACKER

Covering the fresh produce industry since 1893

New marketing firm to handle Warmerdam Packing fruit

10/08/2009 12:47:25 PM

Don Schrack

Flavor Tree Fruit Co., a new firm forged in a partnership between Warmerdam Packing LLC, Hanford, Calif., and fresh fruit veteran Maurice Cameron, will market Warmerdam's nearly 2 million cartons of fruit beginning with the 2010 season.

Cameron has been export sales manager for Trinity Fruit Sales Co. Fresno, since 1999. Previously he was with another Fresno-based fruit marketing company, Lester Distributing Co. Inc.

"I'm very excited about it," Cameron said. "The Warmerdams and their staff are such a nice group of people and such a pleasure to deal with."

Warmerdam Packing and its farming division, Excelsior Farming, were founded in 1965 by Bill Warmerdam, Cameron said. The company, now overseen by chief operating officer John Warmerdam, grows stonefruit and is one of the largest cherry growers in the southern San Joaquin Valley, he said.

"They have about 1,400 acres of cherries and nearly 1,000 acres of the cherries are their proprietary variety, Sequoias," Cameron said. "The volume of their peaches, plums and nectarines will approach one million cartons next year."

The only other U.S. grower of Sequoia cherries is Stemilt Growers Inc., Wenatchee, Wash., which is licensed by Warmerdam to grow the variety, Cameron said.

Flavor Tree will use Warmerdam's long established Sun Tree label for most of the stone fruit, he said, but will develop a new Flavor Tree label for premium fruit. The Sequoia brand will continue for cherries.

Flavor Tree will be the first to market a new proprietary variety of cherries that Warmerdam has developed, Cameron said. The first harvest of the new variety, which he said will likely be named Yosemite, will be in 2010 and is expected to be coming off the trees between the Sequoia and bing harvests.

The new marketing company will be headquartered at Warmerdam Packing, Cameron said.

"I'm interviewing sales candidates and building a staff now," he said. "We should be set up at Warmerdam Packing shortly after the first of the year."

Warmerdam Packing and Excelsior Farming have pioneered some California crops, including fuji apples. The company has pulled all of its apple acreage, Cameron said, but is evaluating some new varieties.

"Maybe in the long term they'll be back in the apple business," he said.

The primary focus for Flavor Tree and the grower-packer-shipper will be to develop stonefruit that is uniquely flavorful, Cameron said. To that end, the company plans to adopt new growing and packing techniques, he said.