

Ratto Bros. star in Safeway commercial

by Tim Linden | October 07, 2013

A longtime San Joaquin Valley grower-shipper is one of the many farms that is featured in a new Northern California Safeway campaign highlighting its ties to local farmers.

The roots of Modesto, CA-based Ratto Bros. date back to the turn of the last century when Antonio Ratto began farming on Bay Farm Island near Oakland, CA, in about 1905. His kids continued the operation and today the company is run by four grandsons of the founder.

Because of its deep roots and Northern California location, Ratto Bros. fits perfectly into Safeway's campaign, which emphasizes its long history in the Golden State.

A press release announcing the campaign begins, "For more than 75 years, Safeway has partnered with local farmers to deliver quality fresh and local produce at prices shoppers can afford. This long-standing commitment to local farms has created a diverse network of farmers and produce growers across the country. In Northern California alone, more than 150 farmers deliver hundreds of locally grown items at a great value."



Frank Ratto

Frank Ratto, who is the firm's marketing manager, said shooting the commercial was quite an ordeal, but when Safeway asked for that type of cooperation, Ratto Bros. was happy to oblige.

"It was amazing," he said. "They shot four days of film for a 60-second spot."

Ratto said a production company from New York produced the piece, which included a

hand model from Hollywood.

"I felt sorry for that guy -- for four days he was just holding produce," he said. "They shot in our cooler, out in the field and in the packingshed. They probably had about 75 people running around here. They even brought in a couple of roosters who just wouldn't cock-a-doodle-doo on command."

The film yields a commercial and Safeway also features several different local farmers on its website with video clips on a continuing basis. At some point Ratto Bros. will be one of the "featured farmers" on the "Fresh From Our Farmers" page.

Ratto enjoyed the experience except for having to wear a plaid shirt. The former business marketing major at San Diego State University had a successful sales career in several fields including medical equipment and devices.

"I don't wear plaid," he said. "I never have."

But for this commercial, there was a wardrobe manager who fitted him with a plaid shirt.

"They probably had \$4,000 worth of shirts and they were all plaid," he quipped.

So there he is in the commercial sitting on a bale of hay in a plaid shirt.

Speaking in general terms about the campaign in the company press release, Mike Minasi, president of marketing for Safeway, said, "Safeway is proud of our 75-year milestone of providing fresh and local produce to shoppers because it truly underscores our focus on delivering quality at affordable prices. By continuing our long-standing tradition of working with the best California farms, shoppers are able to enjoy local produce, which is typically delivered within a day's drive of being harvested."

In that release, Safeway revealed that a recent survey by the company found that "nearly 69 percent of Northern California shoppers believe fresh produce is synonymous with being locally farmed."

Minasi went on to say, "We work closely with the growers to ensure their products meet our high quality specifications. In many cases these close relationships result in our abil-

ity to buy entire crops and secure exclusive arrangements that delight our customers."

In fact, on its "Fresh From Our Farmers" page in early October, Safeway was featuring G&S Farms (Ghiggeri & Stonebarger LLC) in Brentwood, CA, and its regionally famous Brentwood sweet corn.

In the video, the proprietors, representing the two families, admit that they have a relatively small customer base with Safeway being their best customer.

Safeway has about 1,600 stores nationwide and in Canada, with more than one-third of them in California under both the Safeway and Vons banners.