

RATTO BROS. A COMPANY OF FAMILY



BY MAUREEN KATEMOPOULOS ♦ PHOTOS PROVIDED BY RATTO BROS.

In 1905, Antone L. Ratto Sr. started a vegetable business on Bay Farm Island near Oakland. The son of Italian immigrants, Ratto made deliveries to his customers in a horse-drawn cart laden with fresh produce.

Ratto's five sons later joined him in what became the family business. They formalized their partnership in 1957, naming their company "Ratto Bros." Then in 1962, the family looked further afield to the San Joaquin Valley, purchasing several hundred acres of farmland on which to pursue their goals of expansion.

Growing Forward

Over a century since its inception, the business remains very much a family affair with a division in Modesto and headquarters in Oakland. Ronald, Raymond Jr., David, and Frank head up the operations in the fields, the cooling and distribution facility, the sales office, and at headquarters.

Frank, son of Antone Jr., describes the company as providing "specialty produce, a one-stop shop for 45 leafy greens."

Frank recalls that not everyone thought it could be done, "We learned to farm in extreme conditions. We have fertile soil and clean water, with the rivers as options if necessary. Today we are the largest operator of this kind in the area and our products ship throughout the world. We are very blessed to be in the Central Valley." Ratto Bros. farms approximately 1000 acres.

Operations are now principally in the Central Valley, where the company has a 70,000-square-foot cooling and packing house close to the fields in Modesto. Cold chain management ensures that the herbs, fruit, and vegetables that bear the Ratto label are the freshest possible.

"We plant the finest hybrid seeds available and take weekly soil samples which we monitor at our in-house lab to increase quality

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and yield,” Frank explains. “In addition to the use of the best commercial fertilizers and soil amendments, we’ve developed our own composting operation. Not only does this help us better control the way we enhance soil fertility; we believe it is a more environmentally responsible way to farm. To minimize damage and blemishing, we handpick all our produce and pack it right there in the field. This allows us to more rapidly transport our harvest to our on-site cooling facility.”

Post-harvest technology features hydro, vacuum and forced air cooling methods. “Immediate cooling means a longer shelf-life for our vegetables,” Frank notes. Refrigerated trucks take the cooled and cleaned produce to their destinations, usually within hours of being picked.

Education and History

Frank encourages people to visit the company’s website (Rattobros.com), designed to be educational and a resource

to people interested in understanding the health benefits and preparation options for the 70 varieties of herbs, greens, fruits, and other produce. The website also shares videos of Ratto family history.

An array of recipes is featured on the website utilizing Ratto products. Among these recipes is Mamma Ratto’s Italian Braised Collard Greens. This introduction to collard greens and their easy preparation makes it a download worth saving. The link also features recipes for everything from cilantro pesto pizza to prosciutto-wrapped watermelon.

Some things do not change though. The horse-drawn cart remains the Ratto Bros. symbol and is prominent on the company’s logo. The Ratto Bros. reputation for excellence remains just as it was when Antone Ratto first set the standard over a century ago. ^S_M