

THE ENTERPRISE

Produce mover looks forward to more business this year

One of the world's largest third-party logistics providers, through offices in Fresno and Visalia, expects to continue in 2010 putting San Joaquin Valley farm products, including perishable produce, on-the-road to markets all over North America.

Fresno and Visalia are considered key produce movers among some 230 offices serving more than 32,000 C.H. Robinson Worldwide customers. The company, founded in 1905, counts some 7,500 employees. Gross revenue in 2008 is listed at \$8.6 billion.

"It's pretty central to our focus," Jim Lemke, C.H. Robinson Senior Vice President for Produce, said about the Fresno and Visalia business. "If we don't have the Central Valley, nobody gets their fruit."

From navel oranges in winter to summer table grapes, C.H. Robinson Worldwide, has a special produce division.

Despite the Valley's 2009 irrigation and drought woes and the economic recession, overall Fresno volume, including produce, was described as flat but continued steady. The company expects to ship more produce in 2010 than it did in 2009.

Robinson sends produce in-season across the United States, Mexico and Canada primarily through a network of some 45,000 carriers. Using owner-operated highway, rail, air and sea carriers, produce moves to both domestic and overseas markets.

Brazil is a regular destination for produce. In winter, fresh

produce moves into the United States from Chile. It's a chessboard of supply and demand. Yet, C.H. Robinson Worldwide doesn't own a single truck, airplane or rail car.

C.H. Robinson doesn't plant or harvest Valley crops. Still, the hope for 2010 is that "water issues would be resolved," Lemke said.

The company's produce motto is: "A constant supply of product."

About Valley business growth Lemke said: "Our volume expectations are just that it would be more than we shipped last year."

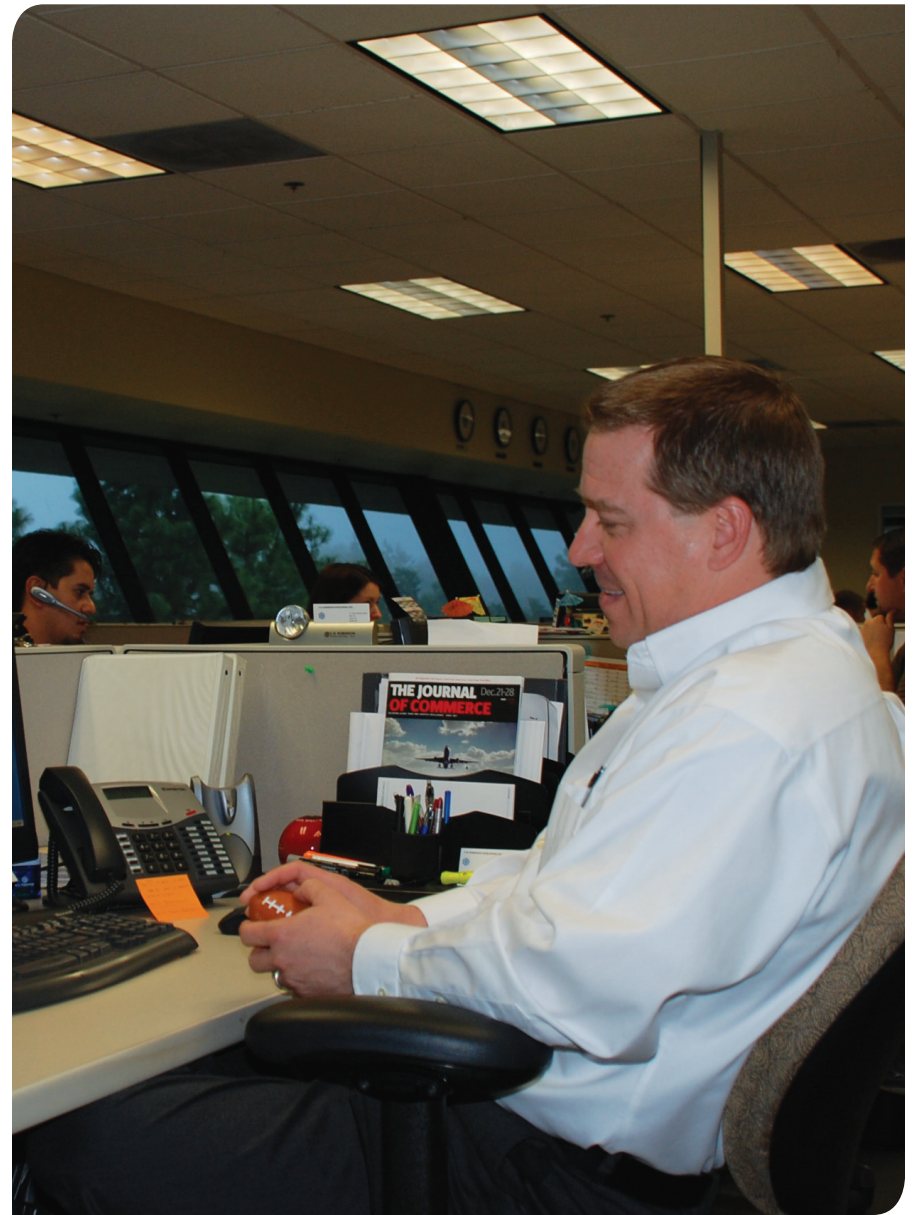
Contrary to some popular TV ads, Foster Farms poultry travels direct from processing, fresh to markets across the nation in a steady stream of refrigerated trucks brokered by C. H. Robinson's Fresno office. Those scruffy chickens in beat-up old cars are for laughs only.

In Fresno, General Manager Brian Ruffino estimated that produce is 20% of the annual overall transportation provided by his office's 18 employees. That doesn't count the nationwide Foster Farms volume.

The Fresno office from its electronic nerve center sends a steady stream of Robinson-provided trucks with Foster Farms poultry to markets year-round.

Fresno-shipped produce includes nuts, fruits and vegetables. Pistachio nuts are perhaps Fresno's largest nut cargo.

Perishables, of course, must be refrigerated. Summer is high-demand time "for ca-



General Manager Brian Ruffino and his 18 employees use this Fresno control center to keep C.H. Robinson's Central Valley commerce on the road.

capacity," Ruffino said.

Fresno's business is "holding" despite the drought, he said.

"We sell all modes, truck, train, ocean vessel," Ruffino said.

Robinson works closely with truckers but it doesn't guarantee revenue-enhancing return loads. Air transport is available from Fresno. But it's more costly.

The Fresno office opened in 1974. Visalia followed in 1997. But a company spokeswoman said that C. H. Robinson began shipping Valley produce by rail before World War I.

Spokeswoman Angie Freeman described the Minneapolis-based company as "understanding supply and logistics" and

focused on consumer demand. The company also focuses on government and military bids for produce.

The bottom line: Growers can spend time and money putting water on their crops, saving it from pests and freezes like the Jan. 2007 freeze that did an estimated \$600-million worth of damage. But the payoff is getting the produce to the consumers.

C.H. Robinson offers "to save you money and create a seamless flow from growers and processors to satisfied customers."

This, the company claims, has saved many of its customers 5% to 10% in total logistics expenditures.