



By Jeff Long

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Major CA grape player VBZ downsizes



Leading California grape grower-shipper to lay off more than 500 staff, while selling a percentage of its farms, as tough seasons take toll

Vincent B Zaninovich & Sons (VBZ), a mainstay of the California table grape industry, will be downsizing its operations after 80 years.

The multi-generational company appears to be the victim of declining returns for table grapes against rising costs of production. VBZ has notified county officials that it will be laying off more than 500 of its employees in early May, including sales and office staff.

The Wonderful Co, grower-marketers of the popular Halos mandarin oranges and Wonderful tree nuts, has agreed to purchase an undisclosed percentage of VBZ's 6,000 acres (2,428ha) in the Delano vicinity.

Unconfirmed reports suggest VBZ's Richgrove (CA) cold storage facilities are also being sold to an unnamed Southern California investment group, which itself is in the process of purchasing another major San Joaquin table grape grower-shipper.

In a release, president John Zaninovich stated that "VBZ has been my family's pride and joy for more than 80 years, but this restructuring is important to our future."