

FOSTER FARMS

diversifies with help of new loader

The poultry business in California is no chicken feed. It is huge, with sales over \$2.5 billion annually. One of the state's leading players is Foster Farms, marketing its chicken and turkey products as "natural" — with no added hormones or steroids, and "fresh" — meaning they are locally grown. Begun in 1939, the company started as a small turkey farm run by Max and Verda Foster. Today it is the largest and most recognized poultry manufacturer in the western United States, with over 10,000 employees and operations in California, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Arkansas, and Alabama. There is also Foster Farms Dairy. Founded in 1941, it is now the largest privately owned dairy in California.

In a state known for its huge agricultural economy, Foster Farms saw an opportunity for diversification that would help their own bottom line: raw feed materials. So in the small community of Traver, south of Fresno, they built their first commodity barn. Materials in the barn include soy, canola, amino, and HFP. Open to outsiders as well as Foster Farms facilities, customers are dairy and poultry feed mills who use the raw materials to blend their own feeds.

"We have the assets and ability to purchase feed products by the trainload," explains Mike McBride, Operations Supervisor. "Even if we're full, the Union Pacific keeps bringing the product, so we had to find ways to relieve that. Selling to the community at large makes good financial sense."

"Our company has not done something like this before," adds Matt Gibbs, another Operations Supervisor. "We sketched out what we thought would work for a barn layout. It was a gamble since this was all new to us, but the truck drivers tell us it is very efficient."

Unlike most commodity barns with open sides to reduce dust, Foster's barn is enclosed to reduce outside contamination of the raw materials. Loading the trucks is a Kawasaki 80ZV-2. To help fight the dust, it is equipped with cyclone precleaners, two reversible fans, ag core radiators, and a sealed engine compartment.

The loader has proved to be quite agile and quick. It places about 25 tons of product in each truck and loads more trucks in its 8-hour shift than management first thought was possible. "We are amazed. We're still in the start-up phase, but we're already loading up to six trucks an hour," says McBride. "By summer we hope to be doing over 80 trucks a day."

"The idea will be to eventually run 24/7 here and then put another barn in another location and do the same thing there," adds Mike Blasco, who is the Operations Manager.

Since the operations supervisors were breaking new ground with the commodity barn, when it came to choosing a wheel loader, they needed to do some homework. After reviewing machines, hearing proposals, and getting demos from Deere, Caterpillar, Kawasaki, and Komatsu, as well as talking with other ag companies that heavily rely on wheel loaders, their decision-making panel of six chose Kawasaki.

"For us, the biggest thing is service," says McBride. "If we're down, we're not making money. Keeping the loader up and running is our primary mission. The huge feed mill down the road uses a number of Kawasaki loaders and the dealer swings through once a week to service them. So we felt comfortable with the choice of Kawasaki and that we would be taken care of by the dealer."

Although Foster Farms hasn't had their 80ZV-2 for very long, maintenance-wise, it's worked out well. "We had some lights come up on the machine and we didn't know what they meant," says McBride. "The dealer mechanic was down the street at the other place and he came right on over."

From zero experience to running a highly successful commodity barn — it just goes to show that Foster Farms is no dumb cluck, thanks in part, to Kawasaki.

Foster Farms, Traver, California is serviced by Cen-Cal Machinery, Fresno, California.



The commodity barn stores materials like soy, canola, amino, and HFT.