

PRODUCE! and more...

'Way back in the Dark Ages, in the year 1967 in the month of July (July 7, to be exact), our little group of God's followers came to the conclusion that God wanted us to operate a little grocery store.

Just a few months earlier, we had started meeting together in a house located in the hills of Reche Canyon, in an effort to be a living church, to not "play church". However, the early days were characterized



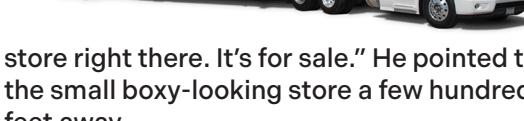
by churchy practices, like printing a little church bulletin every Sunday, doing a radio show in San Bernardino, and having a full-time minister - my dad.

We were a tiny group, never more than 20 people at the most. My dad soon became restless, seeing the others come home from work tired while he was still rested. So the little group asked God what we should do, and what specifically my folks should do to serve Him and use their time and talents for Him, especially in this small body of believers.



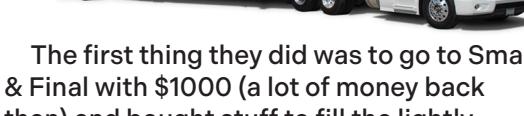
There happened to be a little grocery store about four miles down the Canyon, on a sandy lot next door to a mobile home park. On the same lot was a tiny real estate office, Vessels Realty, run by an old desert rat type of guy, Fred Vessels. (We always did like desert rats!)

My folks went into his office and asked him what a guy could do with his time to earn his way. Fred answered with his elderly high-pitched voice, "Well, there's that little

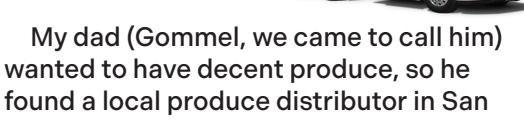


store right there. It's for sale." He pointed to the small boxy-looking store a few hundred feet away.

My folks were surprised but decided to follow up on the idea, and before too long, they found themselves in the grocery business. Neither had any background at all for such a thing, so they had to feel their way along, the blind leading the blind.



The first thing they did was to go to Smart & Final with \$1000 (a lot of money back then) and bought stuff to fill the lightly stocked shelves. Then they had to familiarize themselves with other vendors like Coke, Pepsi, the beer companies, potato chip outfits (Remember Laura Scudder and Bell Brand? Frito Lay was a nuthin' then!), bread companies, etc.



My dad (Gommel, we came to call him) wanted to have decent produce, so he found a local produce distributor in San Bernardino, Grand Central Produce, where

we picked up our orders a couple of times a week. Our salesman was Les Millage who was personal and helpful and helped educate my folks.



Produce? Did you say produce? Yes, I said "Produce". As in fresh fruits and vegetables. Isn't this supposed to be about Produce in the first place? Well, yeah. Then what are you waiting for? Granny Goose?

No, that's a potato chip company. Aren't potatoes a vegetable? Yes. Doesn't that

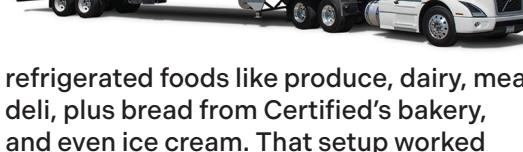


make them produce? Oh, for Pete's sake, what did you smoke or drink this morning?

All right, all right, on to Produce. When we took over the operation of Lucerne Valley Market in March, 1975, our grocery supplier

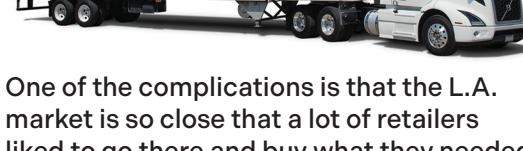


was Certified Grocers of California. I don't honestly remember who brought produce on day one, but it wasn't long before Certified put together a combination load of



refrigerated foods like produce, dairy, meat, deli, plus bread from Certified's bakery, and even ice cream. That setup worked well as long as it was available, which was as long as there were good guys to run the programs. And when the good guys left the programs evaporated.

In the years since that time, about 40 or so, we've struggled to find good produce.



One of the complications is that the L.A. market is so close that a lot of retailers liked to go there and buy what they needed directly, which made it tougher for those of us who depended on the distributors, since they then struggled to fill trucks and set up delivery routes.



In more recent years, we bought produce from Freshko, located in Fresno, with their promise of produce picked within 24 hours of delivery to our store. That worked well at first, but they got bought by a large corporation, which began a long, slow downhill slide, culminating in their closure of the Fresno warehouse and shipping out of Stockton! The long haul from Stockton to Lucerne Valley was hard on the produce quality, and worse was when heavy



watermelon bins were stacked on top of lettuce and other lighter items.

Finally, we noticed a produce outfit out and about in the Victor Valley, called OK Produce. We decided to contact them and



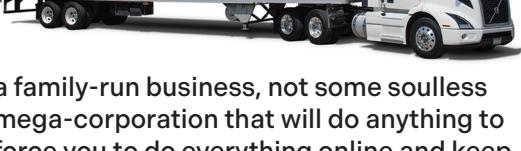
see if that would be a solution to our produce dilemma. They, too, are located in Fresno, and since they already were serving accounts in the High Desert, they were willing to take us on.

We were somewhat concerned how it would go, given the struggle of so many years to find a stable supplier who delivered



excellent produce. However, it has turned out, well, OK! We have been pleasantly surprised by the good spirit we sense. Also the selection is extensive, the quality is excellent, and their prices are good. We couldn't be happier.

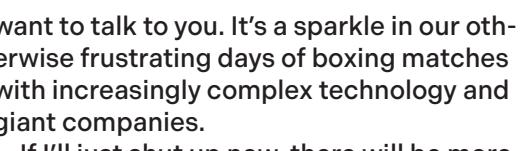
What really grabbed my attention in the last couple of weeks is the way they use their trucks as billboards designed with eye-catching graphics and a sense of humor. The combination of the spirit of the people we've dealt with, plus the humorous creativity of the trucks and the website made me think that this must be



a family-run business, not some soulless mega-corporation that will do anything to force you to do everything online and keep personal contact to a minimum.

Sure enough, I looked up their writeup on their history, and it is a family-run business, the Matoian family, originally from Armenia. The third generation is running the company now. Judging from the pictures on their website, their facility is huge and well-kept. The trucks are attractive with their laugh-inducing memes. They deliver all over California, and also to Las Vegas and southern Oregon.

It is so refreshing to deal with a company with heart and personality, not just computer printouts and desk jockeys that don't



want to talk to you. It's a sparkle in our otherwise frustrating days of boxing matches with increasingly complex technology and giant companies.

If I'll just shut up now, there will be more room to show you some of the "coolest trucks in the business." And I urge you to go to OKProduce.com and browse the website for the delightful humor and creative touch across the whole site. If you can get through that without a few chuckles, you need to get a life!

My very favorite (as anyone who remembers Gommel, my dad, would guess):



On The Lighter Side of Serious Stuff . . . from the Web

"The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom."

Isaiah 40:28

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Tim XCX
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All babies are born right-wing
- drink raw milk
- believe in private property (hate sharing)

- believe in traditional gender roles (want mommy)
- wary of foreigners
- pro-life

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