

Craig Reade  
Santa Maria, Calif.  
Betteravia Farms and Bonipak  
Products: Vegetables  
Size of Operation: 15,000 farmed acres  
In Business Since: 1938  
Farm Credit Partner: Farm Credit West  
Working with Farm Credit Since: before 1983



**They're not called perishables for nothing:** unlike commodities, fresh produce needs to be harvested, cooled, distributed and sold to end customers before it has time to wilt or bruise. This means that produce growers need to have a market ready for what they harvest.

**Craig Reade, Managing Partner of California's Betteravia Farms, has** created a multi-step approach to address this challenge, beginning with planning exactly what the company will plant on each of its 8,500 acres. **"We focus on what our customers need,"** says Craig, explaining that most of the acreage is planted under contract with the major retailers and food processors who make up the bulk of the company's customers. Much of the remaining land is planted with the same crops – primarily broccoli, cauliflower and lettuces – anticipating that these same customers will want the additional fresh product, with only about 10% of the land planted with other crops determined by the expertise and market experience of the management team.

Betteravia is located in the Santa Maria Valley where temperate weather allows three seasons of growing. **In 1996, the company's focus on delivering high-quality, fresh vegetables year-round led it to expand into Yuma, AZ, where warmer weather allows crops to be grown during California's off season.**

Planning, planting and harvesting are only the first few steps for Betteravia, which is a multi-family operation with Craig representing the third generation. A vertically integrated operation, the company also manages cooling, sales and marketing through its sister company, BoniPak Produce Inc.

While weather is a challenge, as for all farmers, Craig says that labor is one of the most significant hurdles **the company faces.** **"If there's a shortage of labor, we're unable to get all of crops harvested,"** he says. The company is looking to technology to reduce some of the labor demand. **"We're also hoping to get involved in immigration reform to see if we can get folks here on permanent basis and on track for citizenship,"** says Craig.

This recognition of how essential people are to the operation goes beyond his seasonal laborers. In fact, Craig says, **"We have a lot of long-term employees, and they've been at the core of our success."** Strong



relationships with suppliers and customers is also key, as is the company's relationship with Farm Credit West, which has financed land, buildings and equipment for the company. "Our philosophy is to align ourselves with good business partners Craig says. "Farm Credit has been with us for such a long time, they've grown with us, and they understand our business from top to bottom."

Looking forward, Craig also sees people - consumers – as key to continued success. "Our consumers are our best opportunity," he says. "They're so educated about food safety and nutrition that as long as we continue to provide a safe, healthy, quality product, we have a lot of opportunity for continued growth!"