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# High-tech almond processing at Blue Diamond Growers

Going for LEED Silver certification, Blue Diamond Growers' new, state-of-the-art almond production plant in Turlock, CA, features nearly 200,000 sq. ft. of sophisticated almond technology, setting new standards of excellence for food safety, processing and building innovation.

Lauren R. Hartman, Editor-in-Chief

**B**lue Diamond Growers' new almond-processing plant in Turlock, CA, will be its first facility to achieve Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) Silver certification later this year. The nearly 200,000-sq.-ft. facility epitomizes best practices for almond production in the U.S. Open since 2013, the plant is thought to be the largest single almond investment in the company's 104-year history.

Representing what Sacramento, CA-based Blue Diamond Growers calls Phase One of a 15-year growth strategy developed about three years ago, the plant in Turlock joins other Blue Diamond Growers' processing plants in Sacramento and Salida, CA. While the Salida facility processes roughly 1 million lb. of raw almonds a day, nearly all of the production

Blue Diamond processes almonds in a continuous, hot batch process. And the almonds can be sliced, diced or slivered with changeovers conducted practically on-the-fly.





Almonds emerge for blanching on this line. Wet and dry process steps are sequential and separate in this facility.

at Turlock serves the company's global ingredient manufacturing business. This is part of the Phase One plan to supply ingredient almonds to major customers and global consumer product groups.

To cut waste, streamline processes and maximize value, Blue Diamond Growers took a lean approach in the planning and designing of the facility. Production begins after raw materials enter the receiving area to be processed, and move in a linear flow through a three-room production area. The products are then packaged and transferred to the shipping area, all on one floor. While not a standard required by the industry, the Turlock almond-processing plant is perhaps the first to completely separate raw materials from finished goods, which helps eliminate any chance for cross-contamination and improves food safety.

The processing facilities in Sacramento use gravity-fed material systems that operate within multistory buildings. "Moving away

from a gravity-feed system was a key consideration for Turlock, [since] trying to move materials to each of the floors can be difficult and energy consuming," says Bruce Lish, general manager, industrial operations.

### Three lines so far

The Turlock production area currently operates one natural product line (brown almonds with skin) and two blanched almond

lines where the skin is removed. Each of the lines is positioned in its own 50-ft.-wide bay, adjacent to the others. "The three lines are set up to produce whole almonds, as well as sliced, slivered or diced product of different specifications, by engaging or bypassing components of the cutting system," explains Ulli Thiersch, plant manager and director of projects and construction, industrial operations.

The production lines boast several advantages over the previous system designs, including the ability to operate continuously, instead of in batches. The lines can also switch from dicing, slicing or slivering practically on-the-fly, whereas other production lines had to shut down and retool for product changeovers.



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