

# Ratto Bros.: California farm grows 70 crops

By JULIA HOLLISTER  
For the Capital Press

MODESTO, Calif. — The history of the Ratto Bros. produce farm reads like America's history book.

In 1905, Antone Ratto, the son of Italian immigrants, started a vegetable business near Oakland and delivered produce using a horse drawn cart. Customers declared the Rattos were so skilled at farming they could make water run uphill to irrigate their crops.

Today, Nick, Gregory, Frank and Anthony Ratto grow over 70 crops on 3,500 acres in agriculture-rich Stanislaus County.

"We farmed in Oakland but needed to find a location that was close to our customer base, with fertile soil and abundant water," said Frank Ratto. "We migrated to Modesto in 1962."

The crops include root vegetables, herbs, leaf lettuces and greens, anise, beets, cactus leaves, red pear tomatoes, leeks and tomatillos.

The hardest crop to grow is leaf lettuce, because of the extreme heat and cold in the area, he said.

Rattos Bros. recently commissioned its new 70,000-square-foot cooling and packing house located minutes from the fields.

Wayne Zipser, executive director of the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau, acknowledged the many contributions of the Ratto Bros. have made in the county.

"The Ratto Bros. Family Farm was inducted into the Stanislaus Ag Hall of Fame a few years ago," Zipser said. "They have been an integral part of the diversity of Stanislaus County agriculture. The county's Farm



Ratto Bros.

**From left, Frank, Geoffrey and Nick Ratto farm 3,500 acres in Stanislaus County, Calif.**

Bureau has always recognized their leadership dealing with a vast array of issues facing our industry.

"We applaud the Ratto family and all of their employees for the great contributions they have made to our community," he said.

The company showed its lighter side about 10 years ago, when it published a calendar featuring Antone Ratto, who had always dreamed of starting a Major League Baseball franchise.

The calendar begins with this story:

"A voice was clear, and so was the message: 'Plow It and They Will Grow.' His purchase of 68 acres in Oakland in 1918 was the first step toward an unforgettable year that has become known as the "Field of Greens."

Accompanying "baseball cards" featured players: Leif E. Greene, Walter Melon, Cab H. Head, Bok Choy and "Caesar Romaine."

Ratto said they had fun creating the "team."

Lately though, COVID-19 has presented big challenges.

"It has been a tremendous amount of effort and expense to remain open and continue to be a viable vegetable supplier," he said. "It took a 100% team effort from all employees to show up and work despite their fears and anxiety associated with COVID."

Supply chain problems greatly affected many facets of the business. There have been price increases and shortages plus late deliveries of seeds, fertilizers, cartons, pallets, twist ties and supplies.

Ratto said there is a long list of challenges facing California agriculture in 2022.

"Where do I begin to list them?" he said. "There are challenging government rules and regulations, labor and water availability and usage, to name a few."

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