

Baroda Farms opens lab for artichoke research

By Brian Gaylord

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Lompoc, CA-based Baroda Farms recently completed a 4,200-square-foot laboratory for artichoke research and plant tissue culturing.

Baroda Farms -- a leading perennial artichoke developer in the United States -- has been growing quality produce, including artichokes, on the Central Coast for more than 20 years. Among the artichokes it has brought to market are Big Heart, Lyon, Feisole and Campania.

Feeling the need to have control of the breeding process, Steve Jordan, president and owner of Baroda Farms, and his wife, Trish, broke ground on the laboratory on Nov. 28. They had been renting lab space for several years but they needed the lab for growth and new artichoke research.

"Propagating artichokes is a long-term commitment," Mr. Jordan said. "It's a three- to six-year process of discovery before you can have plant acreage for production. With our new research lab, we have the capacity to do 5,000 artichoke plants per week per room with capacity to add 600 crop acres per year -- but this is being very optimistic."

The new lab came on-line two weeks ago. "It's European technology with European varieties," Mr. Jordan said. He has contacted a few French and Italian breeders to come up with new items for the U.S. market. The product is driving the technology, he said.

The new laboratory has three growth rooms. Each room has more than 5,000 watts of light bulbs that illuminate hundreds of tubes filled with a varying amount of artichoke plants. The plants will later be transferred to the field to produce large green, red and purple perennial artichokes. The lab also contains autoclaves to bake and sterilize the media, a boiler room, office spaces and greenhouses that are under construction.

Susan Cooper-Smith, lab manager for Baroda Farms, said that she's worked in micro-propagation for more than 23 years, and artichokes are the most difficult products that she's worked on. "Our primary research is on artichoke varieties, but we are also working on several house plant varieties to add to our commercial products," Ms. Cooper-Smith said.

Baroda Farms has five different patented artichoke varieties, and there are more to come, Mr. Jordan said. As of June 1, Baroda Farms has a large quantity of super size/extra large 15s and 18s. Mr. Jordan believes that the only way to grow production of quality artichokes is to use the lab for tissue culture. He said the difference between Baroda Farms and other artichoke growers is that "other artichoke growers divide with an axe, and I use a scalpel."