

Legacy Business Registry Staff Report

HEARING DATE MAY 29, 2019

VERITABLE VEGETABLE

Application No.: LBR-2018-19-041
Business Name: Veritable Vegetable
Business Address: 1100 Cesar Chavez Street
District: District 10
Applicant: Nicole Mason, Director of Community Engagement
Nomination Date: February 7, 2019
Nominated By: Mayor London N. Breed
Staff Contact: Richard Kurylo
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

Veritable Vegetable, the oldest organic produce distribution company in the country, has been an industry leader in the organic trade for over 45 years. Veritable Vegetable formed in 1974 out of a movement that sought to bring low-cost, nutritious food to neighborhood co-ops and community storefronts. This group of collectives, called the People's Food System (PFS), extended throughout the greater San Francisco Bay Area and provided an alternative to the existing corporate food system. Their tagline at the time was, "Food for People, Not for Profit."

There were many collectives that represented different parts of the food system – dry goods, baked goods, dairy, etc. Many PFS support collectives were located in a warehouse located at 3030 20th Street in San Francisco. The founders of these collectives had a unified vision: to create a viable alternative food distribution system that would eventually replace the corporate food system. In December of 1974, four individuals began to focus on buying and selling produce, calling themselves the "Veritable Vegetable Collective." With a small staff, Veritable Vegetable was one of the first wholesale buyers to form direct relationships with local growers to bring organic produce to urban consumers in Northern California. Like most of the People's Food System supply collectives, Veritable Vegetable was a worker-run collective where all workers made business decisions jointly. There was no formal ownership structure at that time.

In 1977, the PFS fell apart, but Veritable Vegetable embarked on its own and moved to 233 Industrial Street. Over the next several years, Veritable Vegetable grew its operation to better meet farmers' needs and to serve the expanded demand for organic produce. Over the years, the company shifted ownership structure several times, but generally continued to operate with collective decision-making responsibilities. The company now operates out of four sites, several on Marin Street, but maintains its offices on Cesar Chavez.

The business is located on the north side of Cesar Chavez Street between Tennessee and Minnesota streets in the Potrero Hill neighborhood.

CRITERION 1: Has the applicant operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?





SAN FRANCISCO

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
LONDON N. BREED, MAYOR

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS
REGINA DICK-ENDRIZZI, DIRECTOR

Yes, the applicant has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years:

- 3030 20th Street from 1974 to 1977 (3 years)
233 Industrial Street from 1977 to 1985 (8 years)
1600 Tennessee Street from 1985 to 1995 (10 years)
1100 Cesar Chavez Street from 1995 to Present (24 years)
1380 Marin Street from 2007 to Present (12 years)
1545 Minnesota Street from 2011 to Present (8 years)
1370 Marin Street from 2015 to Present (4 years)

CRITERION 2: Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?

Yes, Veritable Vegetable has contributed to the history and identity of San Francisco and the Potrero Hill neighborhood.

The Historic Preservation Commission recommended the applicant as qualifying, noting the following ways the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community:

- Veritable Vegetable is associated with the tradition of fresh produce food systems and organic farming.
The property has a Planning Department Historic Resource status of "C" (No Historic Resource Present) as it was evaluated in 2015 and determined to be ineligible for listing as a historic resource.
Veritable Vegetable is referenced in many publications including, but not limited to: Arizona Daily Sun, B the Change, Bay City News, California Agriculture, Civil Eats, Contra Costa Times, Eater SF, Grist, MIT Press, New Hope Network, OPN Connect, PeakPlate, RSF Social Finance Fall Quarterly, San Francisco Chronicle, SF Gate, The Packer, The Produce News, TriplePundit, Trucker News and US Business Executive.
Veritable Vegetable has also been featured in Edible Magazine, FleetOwner Magazine, Heavy Duty Trucking Magazine, Ms. Magazine, WDI Magazine and Wholesale and Distribution International Magazine. Veritable Vegetable is mentioned in John Curl's book, "For all the People," Mark Kitchell's documentary movie, "Evolution of Organic," Shanta Nimbark Sacharoff's book, "Other Avenues are Possible," Joyce Goldstein's book, "Inside the California Food Revolution" and Desmond Jolly's book, "California's New Green Revolution." In addition, Veritable Vegetable has made appearances on CBS KPIX, NPR's Marketplace podcast and Facebook's She Means Business Livestream.
Business Name has received the following awards and/or commendations:
1992 SUSTIE (Sustainable Agriculture Award) from the Ecological Farming Association.
1997 City of San Francisco Environmental Achievement Award.
2005 Small Business Award from the San Francisco Bay Guardian.
2008 Spirit of Organic Award from the Organic Trade Association.
2010 San Francisco Small Business of the Year Award, and then-Mayor Gavin Newsom declared May 18, 2010, to be Veritable Vegetable Day.
2012 Green Fleet of the Year from FleetOwner Magazine.
2015 Women in Business Award from the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce.
2017 Business Environmental Award from Acterra.





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- 2018 Ebbie Sustainability Award from the SF Chamber of Commerce; Outstanding Company from the Climate Collaborative and National Co+Op Grocers Association
- 2019 Top Green Providers Award from Food Logistics.

CRITERION 3: Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?

Yes, Veritable Vegetable is committed to maintaining the physical features, craft, art form and traditions that define the business.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that Veritable Vegetable qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) and recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- The main warehouse on Cesar Chavez Street with orange and green façade, curved roof and canopied solar array.
- Fleet of near-zero emission trucks with custom design by local artist Laura Parker.
- Tradition as a values-driven organic produce distribution company.
- Commitment to supporting organic farmers, increasing access to fresh produce, impacting food policy, and strengthening diverse communities.

CORE PHYSICAL FEATURE OR TRADITION THAT DEFINES THE BUSINESS

Following is the core physical feature or tradition that defines the business that would be required for maintenance of the business on the Legacy Business Registry.

- Distributor of produce.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Small Business Commission include Veritable Vegetable currently located at 1100 Cesar Chavez Street in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

Richard Kurylo, Program Manager
Legacy Business Program



Small Business Commission Draft Resolution

HEARING DATE MAY 29, 2019

VERITABLE VEGETABLE

LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY RESOLUTION NO. _____

Application No.: LBR-2018-19-041
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Business Address: 1100 Cesar Chavez Street
District: District 10
Applicant: Nicole Mason, Director of Community Engagement
Nomination Date: February 7, 2019
Nominated By: Mayor London N. Breed
Staff Contact: Richard Kurylo
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

ADOPTING FINDINGS APPROVING THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY APPLICATION FOR VERITABLE VEGETABLE, CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 1100 CESAR CHAVEZ STREET.

WHEREAS, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; or

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for more than 20 years but less than 30 years, has had no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years, has significantly contributed to the history or identity of a particular neighborhood or community and, if not included in the Registry, faces a significant risk of displacement; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and identity; and

WHEREAS, the subject business is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business; and

WHEREAS, at a duly noticed public hearing held on May 29, 2019, the San Francisco Small Business Commission reviewed documents and correspondence, and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry application; therefore





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LONDON N. BREED, MAYOR

OFFICE OF SMALL BUSINESS
REGINA DICK-ENDRIZZI, DIRECTOR

BE IT RESOLVED that the Small Business Commission hereby includes Veritable Vegetable in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Small Business Commission recommends safeguarding the below listed physical features and traditions at Veritable Vegetable:

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- The main warehouse on Cesar Chavez Street with orange and green facade, curved roof and canopied solar array.
Fleet of near-zero emission trucks with custom design by local artist Laura Parker.
Tradition as a values-driven organic produce distribution company.
Commitment to supporting organic farmers, increasing access to fresh produce, impacting food policy, and strengthening diverse communities.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Small Business Commission requires maintenance of the below listed core physical feature or tradition to maintain Veritable Vegetable on the Legacy Business Registry:

- Distributor of produce.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Small Business Commission on May 29, 2019.

Regina Dick-Endrizzi
Director

RESOLUTION NO. _____

- Ayes -
Nays -
Abstained -
Absent -





SAN FRANCISCO

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LONDON N. BREED, MAYOR

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**Legacy
Business
Registry**

Application Review Sheet

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CRITERION 1: Has the applicant has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years? X Yes No

- 3030 20th Street from 1974 to 1977 (3 years)
- 233 Industrial Street from 1977 to 1985 (8 years)
- 1600 Tennessee Street from 1985 to 1995 (10 years)
- 1100 Cesar Chavez Street from 1995 to Present (24 years)
- 1380 Marin Street from 2007 to Present (12 years)
- 1545 Minnesota Street from 2011 to Present (8 years)
- 1370 Marin Street from 2015 to Present (4 years)

CRITERION 2: Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community? X Yes No

CRITERION 3: Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms? X Yes No

NOTES: N/A

DELIVERY DATE TO HPC: April 17, 2019

Richard Kurylo
Program Manager, Legacy Business Program



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
SAN FRANCISCO



LONDON N. BREED
MAYOR

February 7, 2019

Director Regina Dick-Endrizzi
San Francisco Office of Small Business
City Hall, Room 110
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Director Regina Dick-Endrizzi,

I am writing to nominate Veritable Vegetable for inclusion on the Legacy Business Registry.

The purpose of the City's Legacy Business Registry is to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the city. Per ordinance, a business must be nominated by the Mayor or a member of the Board of Supervisors to be reviewed, processed and approved by the Small Business Commission as a Legacy Business at a public hearing if it meets the criteria set forth.

Originally founded in 1976, this iconic San Francisco institution has strengthened the community and contributed to the cultural fabric and vitality of San Francisco. Veritable Vegetable is a women-owned produce distributor providing fair wages and healthcare to their employees. They are also a San Francisco Green Business and are constantly looking for ways to support the community and environmental sustainability. Veritable Vegetable has been located in the Bayview for over 40 years. The business has contributed to the history and identity of the city and fostered civic engagement and pride.

It is an honor to recognize the legacy and contributions of Veritable Vegetable to our great city of San Francisco.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "London Breed".

London N. Breed
Mayor

1 DR. CARLTON B. GOODLETT PLACE, ROOM 200
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94102-4681
TELEPHONE: (415) 554-6141

Section One:

Business / Applicant Information. Provide the following information:

- The name, mailing address, and other contact information of the business;
- The name of the person who owns the business. For businesses with multiple owners, identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business;
- The name, title, and contact information of the applicant;
- The business's San Francisco Business Account Number and entity number with the Secretary of State, if applicable.

NAME OF BUSINESS:		
Veritable Vegetable, LLC		
BUSINESS OWNER(S) (identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business)		
Mary Jane Evans, Co-Owner, CEO Bu Nygrens, Co-Owner, Director of Purchasing Karen Salinger, Co-Owner, Director of Sales		
CURRENT BUSINESS ADDRESS:		TELEPHONE:
1100 Cesar Chavez San Francisco, CA 94124		((415))641-3500
		EMAIL:
		info@veritablevegetable.com
WEBSITE:	FACEBOOK PAGE:	YELP PAGE
www.veritablevegetable.com	https://www.facebook.com/veritablevegetable/	https://www.yelp.com/biz/veritable-vegetable-san-francisco

APPLICANT'S NAME	
Nicole Mason	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Same as Business
APPLICANT'S TITLE	
Director of Community Engagement	
APPLICANT'S ADDRESS:	
1100 Cesar Chavez San Francisco, CA 94124	
TELEPHONE:	
(██████████)	
EMAIL:	
████████████████████	

SAN FRANCISCO BUSINESS ACCOUNT NUMBER:	SECRETARY OF STATE ENTITY NUMBER (if applicable):
0102411	C0771794

OFFICIAL USE: Completed by OSB Staff	
NAME OF NOMINATOR:	DATE OF NOMINATION:

Section Two:

Business Location(s).

List the business address of the original San Francisco location, the start date of business, and the dates of operation at the original location. Check the box indicating whether the original location of the business in San Francisco is the founding location of the business. If the business moved from its original location and has had additional addresses in San Francisco, identify all other addresses and the dates of operation at each address. For businesses with more than one location, list the additional locations in section three of the narrative.

ORIGINAL SAN FRANCISCO ADDRESS:	ZIP CODE:	START DATE OF BUSINESS
3030 20th Street	94110	1974
IS THIS LOCATION THE FOUNDING LOCATION OF THE BUSINESS?	DATES OF OPERATION AT THIS LOCATON	
<input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	1974-1977	

OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
233 Industrial Street	94124	Start: 1977
		End: 1985

OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
1600 Tennessee Street	94107	Start: 1985
		End: 1995

OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
1100 Cesar Chavez Street	94124	Start: 1995
		End: Present

OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
1380 Marin Street	94124	Start: 2007
		End: Present

OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
1545 Minnesota Street	94124	Start: 2011
		End: Present

OTHER ADDRESSES (if applicable):	ZIP CODE:	DATES OF OPERATION
1370 Marin Street	94124	Start: 2015
		End: Present

Section Three:

Disclosure Statement.

San Francisco Taxes, Business Registration, Licenses, Labor Laws and Public Information Release.

This section is verification that all San Francisco taxes, business registration, and licenses are current and complete, and there are no current violations of San Francisco labor laws. This information will be verified and a business deemed not current in with all San Francisco taxes, business registration, and licenses, or has current violations of San Francisco labor laws, will not be eligible to apply for the Business Assistance Grant.

In addition, we are required to inform you that all information provided in the application will become subject to disclosure under the California Public Records Act.

Please read the following statements and check each to indicate that you agree with the statement. Then sign below in the space provided.

- I am authorized to submit this application on behalf of the business.
- I attest that the business is current on all of its San Francisco tax obligations.
- I attest that the business's business registration and any applicable regulatory license(s) are current.
- I attest that the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement (OLSE) has not determined that the business is currently in violation of any of the City's labor laws, and that the business does not owe any outstanding penalties or payments ordered by the OLSE.
- I understand that documents submitted with this application may be made available to the public for inspection and copying pursuant to the California Public Records Act and San Francisco Sunshine Ordinance.
- I hereby acknowledge and authorize that all photographs and images submitted as part of the application may be used by the City without compensation.
- I understand that the Small Business Commission may revoke the placement of the business on the Registry if it finds that the business no longer qualifies, and that placement on the Registry does not entitle the business to a grant of City funds.

Nicole Mason 2/20/19



Name (Print):

Date:

Signature:

VERITABLE VEGETABLE

Section 4: Written Historical Narrative

CRITERION 1

a. Provide a short history of the business from the date the business opened in San Francisco to the present day, including the ownership history. For businesses with multiple locations, include the history of the original location in San Francisco (including whether it was the business's founding and or headquartered location) and the opening dates and locations of all other locations.

Veritable Vegetable formed in 1974 out of a movement that sought to bring low-cost, nutritious food to neighborhood co-ops and community storefronts. This group of collectives, called the People's Food System (PFS), extended throughout the greater San Francisco Bay Area and provided an alternative to the existing corporate food system. Their tagline at the time was, "Food for People, Not for Profit."

There were many collectives that represented different parts of the food system – dry goods, baked goods, dairy, etc. Many PFS support collectives were located in a warehouse located at 3030 20th Street in San Francisco. The founders of these collectives had a unified vision: to create a viable alternative food distribution system that would eventually replace the corporate food system. In December of 1974, four individuals began to focus on buying and selling produce, calling themselves the "Veritable Vegetable Collective." With a small staff, Veritable Vegetable was one of the first wholesale buyers to form direct relationships with local growers to bring organic produce to urban consumers in Northern California. Like most of the People's Food System supply collectives, Veritable Vegetable was a worker-run collective where all workers made business decisions jointly. There was no formal ownership structure at that time.

In these years, an increasing number of farmers rediscovered organic farming and developed new organic production techniques. Many growers struggled to survive in the face of agribusiness and suburban development. Veritable Vegetable established relationships with many of these growers and began distributing produce beyond the original People's Food System, simultaneously seeking to promote sustainable agriculture and extend knowledge about organic food and agricultural issues.

In 1976, the now six collective members chose to incorporate as a means to have a formal legal structure. By 1977, most of the PFS, including Veritable Vegetable, had become extremely politicized and were using the workplace as a venue for social change, going beyond Veritable Vegetable's mission. With only four members of the Veritable Vegetable collective remaining, the Articles of Incorporation were amended naming Mary Jane Evans as President and David Lansky as Secretary. That year, the PFS fell apart. Veritable Vegetable embarked on its own and moved to 233 Industrial Street. Determined to keep their doors open, Veritable Vegetable approached the surviving collectives and asked for their continued business. They focused on developing relationships with growers and on gaining new retail customers such as the Real Food Company stores and the Berkeley Co-operative. In this way, Veritable Vegetable survived the collapse of the PFS and stayed in business.

Over the next several years, Veritable Vegetable grew its operation to better meet farmers' needs and to serve the expanded demand for organic produce. By 1981, the company was growing quickly, with about a dozen staff. It was then that Veritable Vegetable's current owners – Mary Jane Evans, Bu Nygrens and Karen Salinger – amended the Articles of Incorporation, naming themselves directors. In 1985, the business moved to 1600 Tennessee Street to house more staff, trucks and produce. As the operation grew increasingly more complex, Veritable Vegetable staff asked for a more clearly defined ownership structure. Though the company continued to operate with collective decision-making responsibilities, in 1988 Mary Jane Evans and Bu Nygrens became formal owners. In 1991, Karen Salinger joined them.

In 1995, Veritable Vegetable found itself needing even more space to accommodate its continued growth; the company moved to 1100 Cesar Chavez Street (then Army Street). In 2006, the three Veritable Vegetable owners created an independent LLC and purchased the 1100 Cesar Chavez warehouse, leasing it back to the company. In 2007, Veritable Vegetable leased an additional 10,000 square feet at 1380 Marin Street. Still needing more space, mainly for staff functions and non-produce equipment storage, Veritable Vegetable leased 6,000 square feet at 1545 Minnesota Street in 2011. This space houses the company's kitchen, nap rooms, bike storage, stretching area, locker room and truck tire rotation program.

In 2015, Veritable Vegetable leased an additional 20,000-square-foot space at 1370 Marin Street, adjacent to its existing warehouse at 1380 Marin Street. Veritable Vegetable undertook a large renovation project to make the combined space a state-of-the-art warehouse complete with varying cold storage coolers, a refrigerated dock and high-speed roll up doors. The company offices are still maintained at 1100 Cesar Chavez, but the bulk of operational functions are currently conducted at Marin Street.

b. Describe any circumstances that required the business to cease operations in San Francisco for more than six months?

Veritable Vegetable has proudly been in continuous operation in San Francisco since 1974.

c. Is the business a family-owned business? If so, give the generational history of the business.

The company is not a family-owned business.

d. Describe the ownership history when the business ownership is not the original owner or a family-owned business.

The ownership/corporate directors history of Veritable Vegetable is as follows:

1974 to 1976:	Supporting collective of the People's Food System
1976 to 1977:	Richard Cemberg, Stuart Fishman, Shirley Freitas, Mary Masterson, Margaret Jameson and James Ploss
1977 to 1981:	Mary Jane Evans and David Lansky
1981 to Present:	Karen Salinger, Mary Jane Evans and Bu Nygrens (Directors)
1988:	Mary Jane Evans, Bu Nygrens (Owners)
1991:	Mary Jane Evans, Bu Nygrens, Karen Salinger (Owners)

e. When the current ownership is not the original owner and has owned the business for less than 30 years, the applicant will need to provide documentation of the existence of the business prior to current ownership to verify it has been in operation for 30+ years. Please use the list of supplemental documents and/or materials as a guide to help demonstrate the existence of the business prior to current ownership.

Documentation of the existence of the business verifying it has been in operation for 30+ years is provided in this Legacy Business Registry application.

f. Note any other special features of the business location, such as, if the property associated with the business is listed on a local, state, or federal historic resources registry.

The historic resource status of the building at 1100 Cesar Chavez Street is classified by the Planning Department as Category C, No Historic Resource Present / Not Age Eligible, with regard to the California Environmental Quality Act.

CRITERION 2

a. Describe the business's contribution to the history and/or identity of the neighborhood, community or San Francisco.

Since 1974, Veritable Vegetable has been providing fresh, organic produce to independent retailers and cooperative markets, restaurants, corporate kitchens, schools, hospitals and manufacturers throughout San Francisco. Their efforts have helped to build the City's famed food scene. Veritable Vegetable has also worked to increase food access within its own neighborhood, collaborating with organizations in the area to supply local residents with affordable, organic produce. With their demonstrated leadership, their thoughtful approach to business and their efforts to change policy and impact the organic trade, Veritable Vegetable remains an integral part of San Francisco's food system.

b. Is the business (or has been) associated with significant events in the neighborhood, the city, or the business industry?

Veritable Vegetable, the oldest organic produce distribution company in the country, has been an industry leader in the organic trade for over 45 years. The company has helped affect organic policy change, create inroads and markets for small- and mid-sized organic growers and increase the amount of organic food available in San Francisco and throughout California, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Hawaii. The company's environmental efforts have been widely recognized and include diverting 99% of their waste from landfills, running a near-zero emission fleet of trucks and offsetting energy usage with a 560 panel solar-array.

The organic industry is the fastest growing part of the food system, with sales rising to \$5.6 billion in 2018. The United States remains the largest market in the world for organic products and is now home to over 26,000 certified operations across all 50 states. The increased premiums and profitability organic agriculture offers has improved the livelihoods of U.S. farmers and businesses alike and created more options for consumers.

Veritable Vegetable is committed to community outreach and has supported a multitude of events here in San Francisco through sponsorships, donations, in-kind services and logistics, including: Bike to Work Day, La Cocina Street Food Festival, Dykes on Bikes, the first Earth Day celebration on Crissy Field, LGBT Pride, Good Food Awards, Grazing the Kitchen Table, Healthy Corner Store Coalition, San Francisco Food and Beverage Industry Cluster Study, San Francisco Mime Troupe, Slow Food Nation, Southeast Food Access Working Group, the first Tasting of Summer Produce in Fort Mason, Tenderloin Healthy Corner Store Coalition, Trolley Dances with Epiphany Dance Theatre and many others. The company also hosted Mayor Ed Lee in support of his efforts to reform San Francisco's payroll tax.

c. Has the business ever been referenced in an historical context? Such as in a business trade publication, media, or historical documents?

Veritable Vegetable is referenced in many publications including, but not limited to: Arizona Daily Sun, B the Change, Bay City News, California Agriculture, Civil Eats, Contra Costa Times, Eater SF, Grist, MIT Press, New Hope Network, OPN Connect, PeakPlate, RSF Social Finance Fall Quarterly, San Francisco Chronicle, SF Gate, The Packer, The Produce News, TriplePundit, Trucker News and US Business Executive.

Veritable Vegetable has also been featured in Edible Magazine, FleetOwner Magazine, Heavy Duty Trucking Magazine, Ms. Magazine, WDI Magazine and Wholesale and Distribution International Magazine.

Veritable Vegetable is mentioned in John Curl's book, "For all the People," Mark Kitchell's documentary movie, "Evolution of Organic," Shanta Nimbark Sacharoff's book, "Other Avenues are Possible," Joyce Goldstein's book, "Inside the California Food Revolution" and Desmond Jolly's book, "California's New Green Revolution."

In addition, Veritable Vegetable has made appearances on CBS KPIX, NPR's Marketplace podcast and Facebook's She Means Business Livestream.

Veritable Vegetable has won numerous awards throughout the years, including:

- 1992 SUSTIE (Sustainable Agriculture Award) from the Ecological Farming Association
- 1997 City of San Francisco Environmental Achievement Award
- 2005 Small Business Award from the San Francisco Bay Guardian
- 2008 Spirit of Organic Award from the Organic Trade Association
- 2010 San Francisco Small Business of the Year Award, and then-Mayor Gavin Newsom declared May 18, 2010, to be Veritable Vegetable Day
- 2012 Green Fleet of the Year from FleetOwner Magazine
- 2015 Women in Business Award from the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce
- 2017 Business Environmental Award from Acterra
- 2018 Ebbie Sustainability Award from the SF Chamber of Commerce; Outstanding Company from the Climate Collaborative and National Co+Op Grocers Association
- 2019 Top Green Providers Award from Food Logistics

d. Is the business associated with a significant or historical person?

Through their integral participation in the food movement and advocacy, Veritable Vegetable has helped form the organic industry that exists today. Leaders in the industry have shown their support through their continued business with Veritable Vegetable such as Alice Waters (Chez Panisse/Edible School Yard), Judy Rodgers (deceased, Zuni Café), Charles Phan (Slanted Door) and famous institutions here in San Francisco like Rainbow Grocery and Other Avenues. Veritable Vegetable has collaborated with pioneers in the industry such as Michael Pollan, Michael Funk (founder of UNFI), Walter Robb (former co-president of Whole Foods) and Mark Lipson (formerly USDA). Former Mayor Ed Lee, Supervisor Maliah Cohen, Carol Moseley Braun (U.S. Ambassador and presidential candidate) and Kathleen Merrigan (Deputy Secretary of Agriculture under President Obama) have all visited Veritable Vegetable's offices and warehouses.

e. How does the business demonstrate its commitment to the community?

Veritable Vegetable has been a values-driven business since inception. They are committed to contributing to a sustainable food system that values the true costs associated with growing and moving food from farm to table, and they are committed to increasing food access to diverse communities.

They donate product and logistics to community organizations such as offering weekly produce donations to 10 schools within the San Francisco Unified School District Wellness Programs each year. Additionally, Veritable Vegetable partners with the San Francisco-Marin Food Bank and other local hunger relief organizations by donating food daily that is edible but not sellable. The company consistently supports the San Francisco Pride event and the Dykes on Bikes Women's Motorcycle Contingent with logistics support.

Veritable Vegetable regularly provides tours to local school children, businesses and advocacy groups to educate them about the importance of distribution in the organic trade. The company also promotes involvement in City initiatives by providing information to staff and by sponsoring staff attendance at City events, meetings and efforts such as the traffic calming and beautification project on Cesar Chavez Street, organized by CC Puede, a public private-partnership with the Planning Department; the Dogpatch Parking Management Plan, a project of SFMTA; and a host of others as referenced above. They also sponsor events, and partner with local organizations to empower local businesses and educate San Francisco's community members.

Finally, throughout its history, Veritable Vegetable has offered internships and mentoring programs to local residents.

f. Provide a description of the community the business serves.

Veritable Vegetable partners with over 220 organic growers, with an emphasis on supporting small- to mid-size farms that are under 50 acres. Currently, over 60% of the growers they work with are regional, located within 400 miles of the company's warehouse.

Veritable Vegetable's customer base is diverse and spans across many industries and regions. They have relationships with over 550 independent stores, co-ops, restaurants, manufacturers, box Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and meal kit providers, corporate campuses, schools and wholesalers. Veritable Vegetable's customers are located throughout California and parts of Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Hawaii and New York. Veritable Vegetable has been providing organic produce to businesses in neighborhoods all over San Francisco for decades, including: Bi-Rite Market, Rainbow Grocery, Falletti Foods, Other Avenues, Zuni Café, Canyon Market and many others.

g. Is the business associated with a culturally significant building/structure/site/object/interior?

Not applicable.

h. How would the community be diminished if the business were to be sold, relocated, shut down, etc.?

There is no doubt San Francisco would suffer if Veritable Vegetable were to shut down or relocate. Not only does Veritable Vegetable provide residents of the Bay Area with fresh, healthy organic produce, and increase food access, but they are the only organic distributor in San Francisco that sustainably runs its business on core values. The company is unique in that they are women-owned and led. Nearly 50% of staff are women and in roles traditionally held by men in the distribution industry, such as truck drivers, fork lift operators and executive positions.

As a San Francisco Green Business and a Certified B Corp, Veritable Vegetable demonstrates their unwavering commitment to the environment and social justice. This means that produce is transported in a near-zero emission green fleet of trucks, and produce is stored in warehouses offset by a solar array. Veritable Vegetable is one of the only businesses in the city that can boast a 99% waste diversion rate. Veritable Vegetable pays its entry level workers over 26% above the San Francisco minimum wage and offers excellent benefits to its staff.

If Veritable Vegetable were to close or relocate, its staff of 122 people would be without jobs. Local small- and mid-sized organic farmers would lose access to San Francisco's thriving food market, and several retailers and restaurants would lose access to this key part of the supply chain.

CRITERION 3

a. Describe the business and the essential features that define its character.

Veritable Vegetable's main warehouse sits at the corner of Cesar Chavez and Tennessee streets, at the southern edge of the Dogpatch. The company operates 24-7, making the building a hive of activity. The warehouse stands apart from its neighbors because of its orange and green façade, curved roof and canopied solar array of 560 solar panels. Its unique presence along the

Cesar Chavez corridor reflects the company's longstanding commitment to environmental sustainability and regeneration.



Veritable Vegetable's fleet of near-zero emission trucks are custom designed by local artist Laura Parker and are a familiar site on the streets of San Francisco. Their recognizable tagline, "Delivering organic. Driving change" goes to the very heart of the company's mission.



b. How does the business demonstrate a commitment to maintaining the historical traditions that define the business, and which of these traditions should not be changed in order to retain the businesses historical character? (e.g., business model, goods and services, craft, culinary, or art forms)

Veritable Vegetable is a social enterprise, demonstrating a radically different approach to distributing organic produce. They support organic farmers, increase access to fresh produce, impact food policy, strengthen diverse communities and create a healthier world through their work. Women-owned and values-driven, they create a fair and dynamic workplace. Their stated

values of integrity, sustainability, community, innovation and excellence are the basis for all decision making. They deeply value the people who make up their community of staff, growers, customers and community partners whose collective labor is fundamental to the organic trade.

Veritable Vegetable is committed to maintaining its historical tradition as a values-driven organic produce distribution company.

c. How has the business demonstrated a commitment to maintaining the special physical features that define the business? Describe any special exterior and interior physical characteristics of the space occupied by the business (e.g. signage, murals, architectural details, neon signs, etc.).

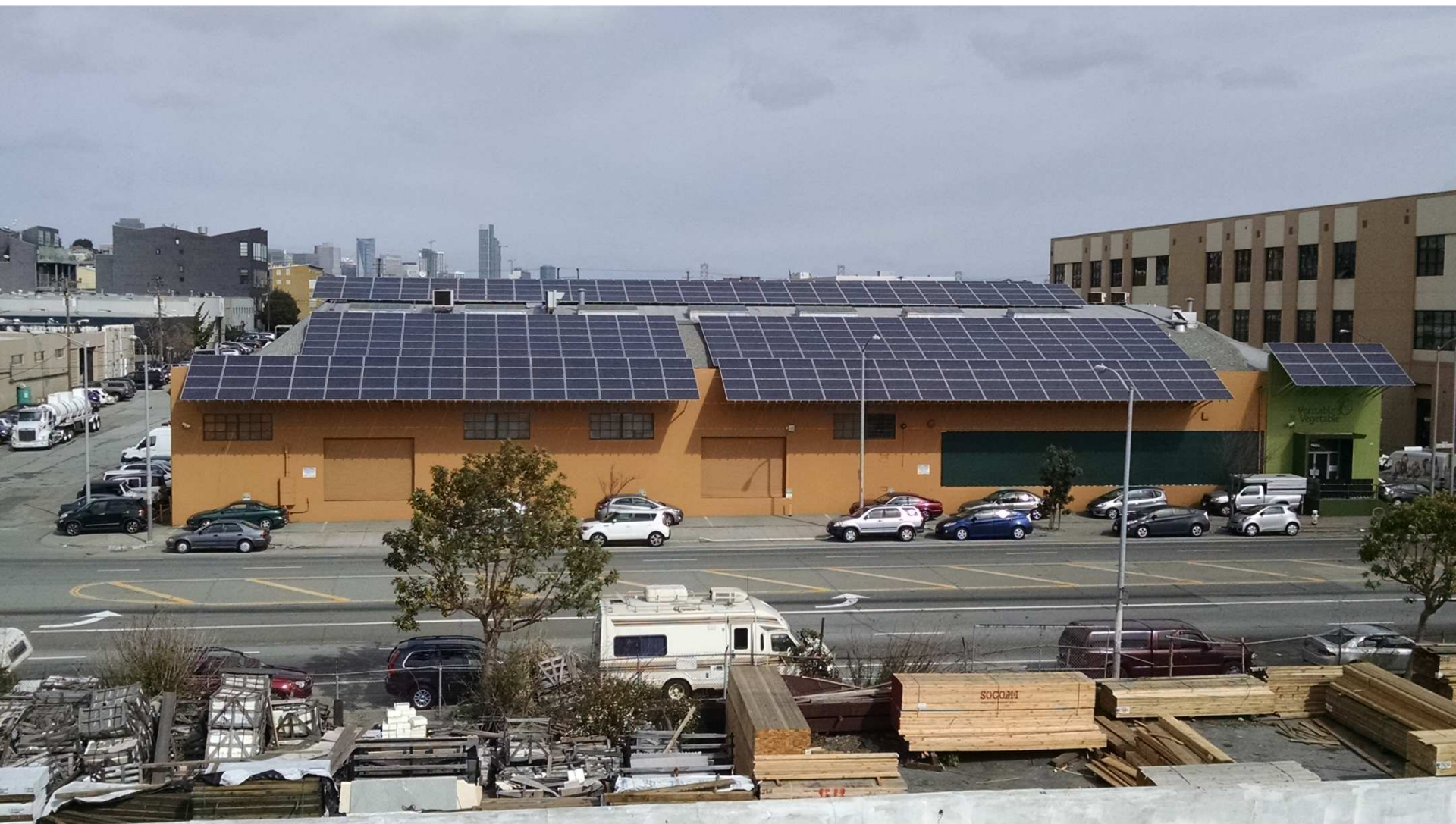
The original warehouse was designed by Alben Froberg and built in 1949. Prior to Veritable Vegetable's occupancy, the warehouse was used for storage and meat processing. Through the years, there were minor changes to the building, but mostly internal. The building is a 114' x 200' single story structure with partial mezzanine warehouse structure. The perimeter walls are of reinforced concrete and are approximately 21' tall. The roof is framed from built-up wood bowstring trusses, clear spanning the 114' width and occurring at 20' centers. Per the original permit drawings, the original building had 8 steel coiling doors, 10 clerestory industrial steel sash windows into the warehouse, 5 "banks" of wooden windows with wood louvers into the office spaces and a wood frame personnel entry door and sidelite.

Since the original construction and prior to Veritable Vegetable, two steel coiling doors have been removed and infilled with concrete, a newer steel coiling door has been cut in a new location, two clerestory industrial steel sash windows have been removed and infilled with concrete, four of the original five "banks" of wood windows/louvers have been replaced with aluminum sash and the original wood frame personnel entry door has been replaced with aluminum storefront.

Since the building has been used and purchased by Veritable Vegetable, the only change to the building has been the addition of the solar array in 2008. A 1,700-square-foot solar awning has been installed along the length of the south elevation as well as approximately 6,500 square feet of solar panels on the south sloping roof. All ground level windows have been covered by semi-opaque nylon screening in aluminum frames.

d. When the current ownership is not the original owner and has owned the business for less than 30 years; the applicant will need to provide documentation that demonstrates the current owner has maintained the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms. Please use the list of supplemental documents and/or materials as a guide to help demonstrate the existence of the business prior to current ownership.

Not applicable. The current ownership has been in place for over 30 years.





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Eco Bay Services

The Wire

I Do Cabinet, Inc

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Tennessee St

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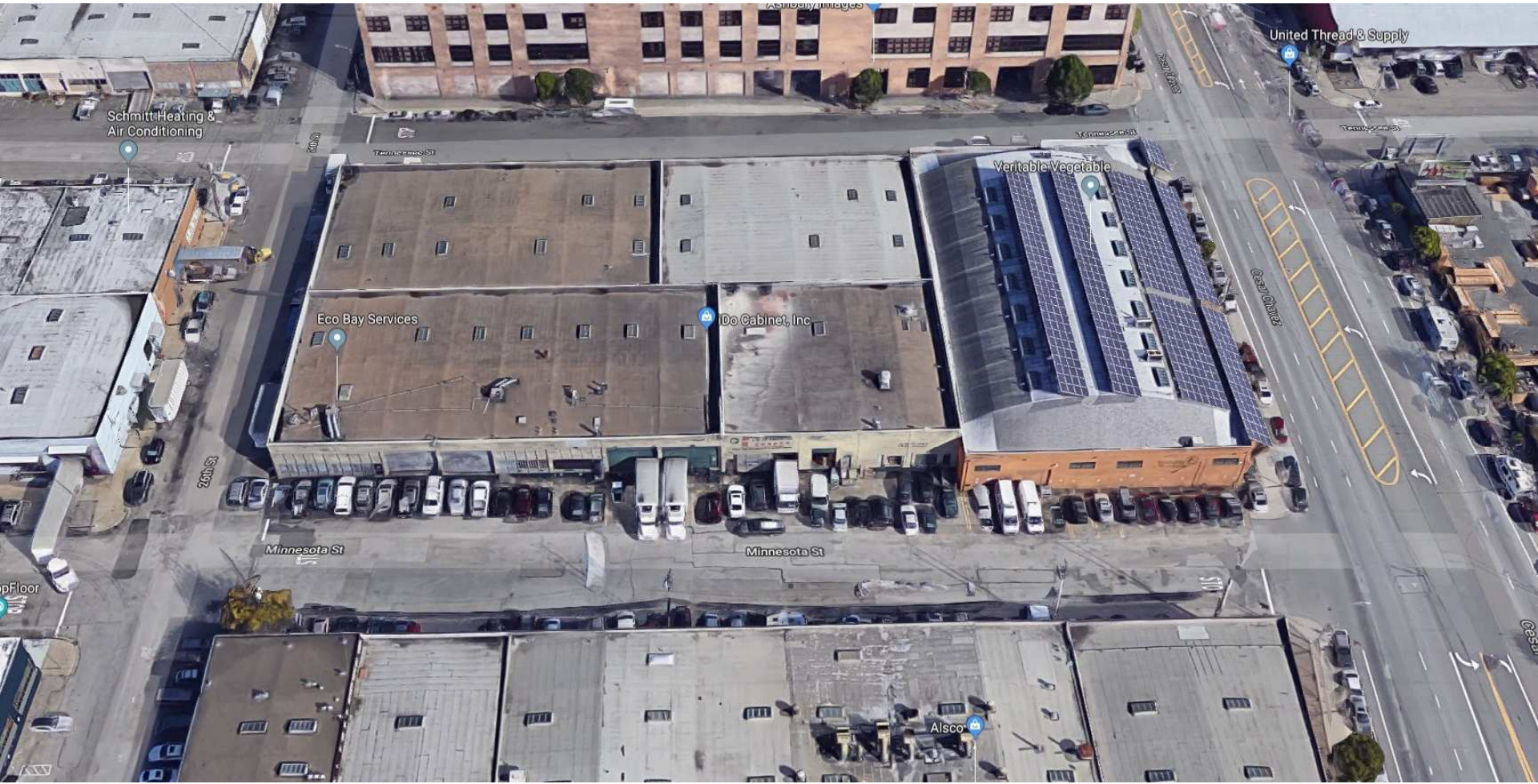
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VIDEOS



Veritable Vegetable: Delivering Organic, Driving Change

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rP9GVjyndMI>

Published on Feb 10, 2017

Posted by Malia Jenkins

“Created 2016-17 by George Washington High School students who took a field trip to the Veritable Vegetable facilities in San Francisco, CA.”



Hippy Gourmet visits Veritable Vegetable!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydldvrKnAGg>

Published on Nov 1, 2007

Posted by hippygourmet

“Veritable Vegetable is a women owned and operated organic and bio-dynamic produce distribution company based in San Francisco. Veritable Vegetable supports small family farms across the west from Southern Colorado to California and everywhere in between. They provide restaurants, schools and catering companies with the finest organic and sustainable produce imaginable! The Hippy Gourmet is proud to feature Veritable Vegetable in an upcoming episode with Cafe Gratitude in San Francisco!”



Veritable Vegetable

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RyWAeUdIH8>

Published on Jun 4, 2017

Posted by BaciPix



Veritable Vegetable - Entrepreneur Showcase - Slow Money 2011

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQweiaOw6aA>

Published on Nov 15, 2011

Posted by Slow Money

“Entrepreneur Showcase - Veritable Vegetable presentation from the 2011 Slow Money National Gathering”



Veritable Vegetable Drives for Cleaner Air

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRQs8ij4t0I>

Published on Feb 6, 2014

Posted by California Air Resources Board

“Veritable Vegetable is a Bay Area local produce delivery company who believes in sustainable business practices (since 1974!). They were able to purchase a cleaner fleet of trucks with the help of AB-118 funding. Their investment in cleaner diesel technology saved fuel, money and the air we breathe.”



Reusable Packaging Case Study: Tesla Motors & Veritable Vegetable

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwgAQ29jLWM>

Published on Apr 26, 2013

Posted by useusables

“Learn how Tesla Motors and Veritable Vegetable are utilizing Reusable Transport Packaging to realize environmental benefits, economic benefits for their organizations, and ergonomic benefits for their workers.”



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WHEN THE POWER OF LOVE OVERCOMES
THE LOVE OF POWER THE WORLD WILL
KNOW PEACE
— JIMI HENDRIX

DRIVING CHANGE > SAN FRANCISCO GREEN BUSINESS

San Francisco Green Business

What does it mean to be a certified San Francisco Green Business?

The San Francisco Green Business Program encourages San Francisco businesses to operate in an environmentally responsible manner and recognizes them for their efforts. In order to be recognized as a San Francisco Green Business, a business must meet environmental standards in four areas: waste reduction, water conservation, pollution prevention, and energy conservation. They must also be in compliance with all federal, state, and local regulations.

San Francisco Green Business program standards are developed by program staff with input from industry experts, utility companies, pollution prevention professionals, City inspectors and trade associations. Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) coordinates the standards development process for the Bay Area. In San Francisco, the standards are further revised to incorporate local ordinances and environmental services available to businesses in the City of San Francisco.

Why did we become a certified San Francisco Green Business?

Becoming a certified San Francisco Green Business demonstrates our unwavering commitment to conserving resources, building community, and maintaining the health and safety of our staff. This certification ensures our environmental practices align with our culture of and deep commitment to environmental sustainability. The certification process took an in-depth look at the practices and methods we employ to conserve energy, water and natural resources, reduce waste, and utilize low-toxic products in our workplace. Joining the San Francisco Green Business Program further connects us with the community of businesses that share our values.

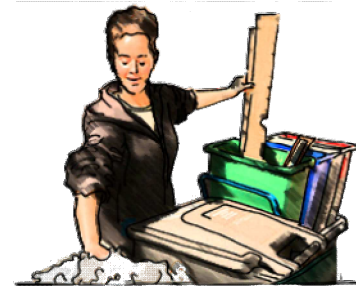
[CHECK OUT SOME ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES HERE >>](#)

Who is San Francisco Green Business?

The mission of San Francisco Green Business is to help San Francisco businesses adopt environmental practices that are sustainable as well as profitable. They set stringent criteria, provide technical assistance, and publicly recognize and promote Green Businesses with a seal that enables customers to support businesses that align with their values.

The Program is made of up of three City agencies. SF Environment runs the program and is supported by the San Francisco Department of Public Health and San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. The San Francisco Green Business Program is a member of the Bay Area Green Business Program and the California Green Business Network.

[CHECK OUT OUR PROFILE ON THE SF GREEN BUSINESS DIRECTORY >>](#)



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of our electricity is generated from our solar array

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GREEN FLEET OF THE YEAR



Veritable Vegetable

Organic produce distributor shows how any size fleet can set a good example

By **Brian Straight** | managing editor

Back in the 1970s, long before organic living became the preferred lifestyle for so many in this country, the San Francisco Bay Area was home to a vibrant, locally grown food network focused on procuring healthy food products. This system, called the People's Food System, created an alternative to the dominant food system in place at the time. Nearly 40 years later, San Francisco has moved this alternative system into the mainstream. Throughout this entire period, Veritable Vegetable (VV) has continued to move organic produce, becoming the nation's oldest organic produce company.

Veritable Vegetable provides full service distribution of organic fresh fruits and vegetables to retailers, restaurants, schools, corporate campuses and wholesalers. Located in San Francisco, VV's distribution area covers California and includes parts of Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Nevada. In addition to providing leadership in establishing and expanding the organic agriculture industry, VV focuses on utilizing green technologies to reduce energy consumption and waste at every level of the company, including its truck





When looking for a new green technology, Veritable Vegetable's approach is not bottom-line driven.

fleet, and for those efforts, the company has been named *Fleet Owner's* 2012 Green Fleet of the Year.

As distribution became a critical part of the People's Food System, Veritable Vegetable was founded to meet that need, distributing produce from farms to various buying clubs around the city. "The movement started with people participating in buying clubs in different neighborhoods," relates Mary Jane Evans, CEO & one of three co-owners of Veritable Vegetable. "As people's participation grew, the size of the buying clubs overwhelmed the garages the clubs were operating out of, and they had to become storefronts." The People's Food System eventually grew to 11 storefronts. Throughout its growth, though, a need developed—to bring produce from farm to fork, as they say.

"I began working with the company in the fall of '76 and we kind of re-founded the company," Evans remembers. "Veritable Vegetable started when distribution became a component of the People's Food System, hauling food from farms to warehouses and storefronts. We really started to understand organic agriculture and the need to get produce to market. The idea was to support organic farmers by moving their product to the stores."

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

As part of this effort, Veritable Vegetable believed it was important to promote sustainable agriculture and to extend the community's understanding about organic food and agricultural issues. The company's founding principles, proudly proclaimed on its website, include collaboration, cooperation and interconnect- edness, and it remains committed to the original unifying principle of the People's Food System, "food for people, not for profit."

Guided by Evans and fellow co-owners Bu Nygrens and Karen Salinger, VV takes pride in its values-based approach as a model for all business decisions. "We're fundamentally focused on how we interact with the environment," Evans says. This is apparent throughout the company. VV operates three warehouses in the San Francisco area, one of which is equipped with 570 solar panels on its roof that offset 70% of

"When I train new produce clerks, I tell them [VV] is responsible for family organic agriculture in California."

the electricity used at the company. Veritable Vegetable also sends only 1% of its waste to landfills, recycling or reusing the remainder.

According to David Benson, produce manager at Briar Patch Community Market, a natural food market in Grass Valley, CA, what Evans describes is truly the way Veritable Vegetable operates. "It's about farmers, it's about customers," Benson says, adding that VV delivers four times a week to the market. "We support them with the lion's share of our business. When I train new produce clerks, I tell them [Veritable Vegetable] is responsible for family organic agriculture in California because they've been with the family farms since the beginning."

Benson, who worked as an order picker for Veritable Vegetable, says one of the keys to their success is with whom Veritable Vegetable chooses to do business. "One of the things I noticed when I was pulling [orders] for Briar Patch was Veritable always picked the best growers," Benson points out.

In addition, VV also genuinely cares about those growers, according to Kerri Williams, produce manager at Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op. "I really enjoy working with them rather than other companies because it's about the farms with them," Williams says. "They facilitate the farms to make sure we get the product we need."

The Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op, which first opened its doors in 1973, expanded through the years, including a major relocation and expansion effort in 1989 that placed a renewed focus on organic produce. In fact, Williams points out that the co-op has the largest organic produce department in the U.S., and almost all of that produce is delivered by Veritable Vegetable six times a week.

"They were very instrumental in the growth we've had

here at the co-op,” Williams says. “At the time we started, we weren’t that into organic produce, but then we doubled our size [and they were right there to help us.] They have bent over backwards in every way to help us.”

To help further its sustainable mantra, if you will, Veritable Vegetable looks for environmental opportunities where they best fit. And that even extends to the packaging it uses to secure product to pallets. The company is currently testing a reusable wrap from Pallet Wrapz, which would eliminate a large amount of plastic waste. “Basically, it wraps straps around the pallet and you Velcro it down,” says Chris Adams, transportation manager. According to Pallet Wrapz, the product can be wrapped around a skid and tied down and then unwrapped in less than a minute, saving labor time. The company goes on to say that the product, which can be used up to 1,000 times before it needs to be replaced, can save a company up to \$300,000 a year in labor and materials if it wraps 500 six-foot pallets a day.

A BRAND EXTENSION

The company’s commitment to sustainable business practices is perhaps most notable in its decision to operate a modern and clean fleet of vehicles. “Ensuring our product stays fresh, and to avoid breakdowns, we need to have state-of-the-art equipment,” Evans says. “We are a part of our community and we want every part of our company to contribute positively—that is why we keep our trucks clean and invest in green technologies.

“We’re not bottom-line driven,” Evans points out. “We have a pay ratio of 4:1, top to bottom. What we’re looking to do is consider what is most beneficial in the long term. We have found that responsibility does yield savings over time, but it’s necessary to take a long view.

“Partially because of the pay scale, and partially due to the modern equipment, drivers tend to remain with Veritable Vegetable,” Evans says.

“We are part of our community and we want every part of our company to contribute positively.”

On the fleet itself, which travels more than 1.75 million miles annually, Veritable Vegetable is proof positive that size does not matter. The company operates a mix of vehicles, from Sprinter vans to Freightliner M2s, Peterbilt 385, 386, and 378 models, Kenworth T660s, and six Kenworth hybrids.

Fleet transportation systems manager Tom Howard and Adams are focused on the long term, seeking to maximize every tenth of a mile per gallon. According to Howard, a Kenworth T370 hybrid truck is saving the company about 215 gals. per month. “I figure that one truck is saving us \$900 per month,” Howard says, when compared to a non-hybrid unit. Kenworth T270 hybrid straight trucks reduce fuel consumption by about 58 gals. per 1,000 mi. run with the average VV straight truck covering 60,000 mi./year. The T370 tractors save about 36 gals. per 1,000 mi., although they offer a slightly longer payback period as they travel about half the annual miles of the straight trucks.

“The 24-ft. straight trucks are getting much better mileage than their predecessors,” Howard notes, pointing out that the vehicles are achieving 9 mpg vs. just 7.2 mpg for their non-hybrid predecessors.

Howard says the average hybrid costs the fleet about \$37,000 more than a traditional diesel-only vehicle, but between grants and tax credits that Veritable Vegetable has been awarded and out-of-pocket fuel savings, a return on investment could be realized just two years after the purchase of each vehicle.

“It’s gratifying to see such a well-run organization, dedi-



Veritable Vegetable provides full-service distribution of organic fresh fruits and vegetables.

cated to distributing organically grown food, being recognized for its commitment to an environmentally sustainable operation,” says Gary Moore, Kenworth general manager and Paccar vice president. “They practice what they preach and we’re proud of the role that the company’s Kenworth hybrids have played in their environmental stewardship.”

GOING AUTOMATED

Unfortunately, hybrid vehicles do not suit every route that Veritable Vegetable services. To run the longer routes, the company utilizes Kenworth T660s with Eaton UltraShift Plus automated mechanical transmissions (AMT). One of these trucks, Howard says, is a 2012 model that is achieving around 7 mpg, which is up nearly a full mpg over a 13-spd. manual transmission truck it replaced. While Howard cautions that it’s impossible to draw any conclusions since the trucks are different makes and models, and were not driven by the same driver under the same conditions, he is nonetheless pleased with the performance.

Adams adds that while the automated transmissions have been a benefit in many respects, the most positive aspect of them has been in driver comfort. “Mechanically they’ve been very reliable,” she says. “The drivers have had no trouble adapting to them. I have one driver who has a back injury and he’s very comfortable because he doesn’t have to shift. I have another who [has had rotator cuff problems] and he, too, is more comfortable because he’s not always shifting.”

On its long-haul tractors, VV employs battery-powered auxiliary power units (APUs), Webasto Product North America diesel heaters, and are equipped with idle shutdown technology to turn off the engines after 3 min. of idle time.

Green technologies don’t just permeate the truck and tractor fleet, they are also a vital part of the trailer inventory. VV has 17 refrigerated trailers, nine of which are 48-ft. units. Mostly comprised of Utility Trailer VS2RA models, the fleet includes Carrier Transicold Vector 6500 hybrid refrigeration units installed on 10 of the trailers.

The Vector 6500 is a single-temperature all-electric unit that produces very little noise, according to Carrier Transicold. The company points out that the units, when operating in standby operation, eliminate engine emissions from the refrigeration unit, conserve fuel, and reduce operating costs by 40 to 70%. According to Howard, each unit runs about 2,800 hours per year, making the hybrid technology a perfect fit.

Going beyond hybrid refrigeration, Veritable Vegetable outfitted its entire 48-ft. trailer fleet with ATDynamics’ trailer skirts. The skirts, which VV tested for a year, cost the company about \$1,700 apiece and provide a \$1,300 savings each per year, Howard says.

“[Installation] was done because we had a skirt on one trailer and we pulled it for about 90,000 mi. It was pulled by different tractors and different drivers, and we got a 3% improvement across the board,” he points out. Fully installed, Veritable Vegetable is saving about 4,775 gals. of fuel per year just by using the skirts.

The trailers, like the entire fleet, run on Bridgestone low-profile 22.5-in. tires with Bridgestone Bandag Tire Solutions FuelTech recaps. To keep those tires properly inflated, Veri-



About 65% of Veritable Vegetable’s employee mix is female, led by co-owners Mary Jane Evans (left), Karen Salinger (rear), and Bu Nygrens (right).

table Vegetable employs the Meritor Tire Inflation System (MTIS) by PSI, maintaining 100 psi at all times. MTIS uses compressed air from the trailer’s air system to inflate any tire that falls below a preset pressure whenever the vehicle is in operation.

To further cut down on wind resistance, the fleet installed the Deflektor, a wheel insert that reduces wind resistance, on its trailer’s wheels. To show how Howard and Adams leave no stone unturned in their quest for improvement, Howard relates he first learned of the Deflektor when seeing it profiled in a magazine. After investigating, he quickly became a believer in the device.

DRIVING SMARTER

While Veritable Vegetable reviews all the latest on-vehicle technologies in its efforts to reduce fuel consumption, it does not stop there. Adams is constantly looking at the efficiency in routing as well.

“We always look for the shortest distance between two points,” she says, adding that traffic conditions, particularly for drivers hauling into Los Angeles and Phoenix, are always a concern. “We have shifted lately to have the trucks leave earlier. In fact, we’ve shifted everything including the warehouse operations to get the trucks out earlier. ... That change has happened over the last couple of years.”

Veritable Vegetable is also certified to backhaul. So while its trucks may head to a delivery point full of organic produce, they may return stacked with micro-brews. “We do a fair amount [of backhauls] and we’re trying to build up that business,” Adams says, “because [it makes no sense to] have a truck that’s empty when you can have it full.”

And because the trailers are kept at 38-40 deg. F, almost any commodity, including dry freight, can be mixed with produce. “It’s really an ideal shipping temperature,” Howard says.



Hauling all that produce, though, requires a large number of pallets. To reduce costs and improve the environment, Veritable Vegetable now utilizes mostly reusable plastic pallets. “They’re recycled plastic,” says Adams. “When we make a delivery, there is a charge on the invoice for pallet return.” In most cases, Adams points out, the pallet exchange results in an even swap as drivers will pick up unused pallets in a 1 to 1 ratio with dropped pallets.

TRAINING DRIVERS

As most fleets know, the biggest factor contributing to reduced fuel usage is drivers. At Veritable Vegetable, the quest for the ideal driver training system is still ongoing, but Adams says she’s found the company’s best system so far is a pair of driving veterans. “We’re looking for the right program but haven’t found a good fit yet,” she says. “I have two drivers now that do the training, acting as mentors. What I’ve found is that if I have a new driver and they’re trained by a good driver, then I have two good drivers.”

Adams and Howard are also exploring potential driver-incentive programs and systems that provide drivers instant feedback on their actions and driving behaviors. “We’re try-

“We are embracing the truck fleet and trying to educate people on how important it is in moving the food.”

ing to figure out the best way to train people, and it’s becoming an area that is [increasingly] difficult with CSA and other regulatory hurdles,” Adams says.

Despite being a relatively small fleet as measured by some standards, there is nothing small about how Veritable Vegetable attacks the challenges facing its truck fleet. “We put our financial resources towards these kinds of things,” Adams says. “We’re not a public company, we don’t have to answer to shareholders. We want to return the highest price we can to the grower” and the best way to do that is to operate efficiently.

And with all it has accomplished, Veritable Vegetable’s fleet is a source of pride for the organization. “We are embracing the truck fleet and trying to educate people on how important it is in moving the food,” Evans says. 🚚

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Veritable Vegetable

Setting Standards for Sustainable Food and Business Practices

Produced by Sean Barr & Written by Camila Osorno

San Francisco's Veritable Vegetable (VVEG) was founded in 1974 and has since grown from a small people's food collective into a bastion of sustainability and ethical business practices. As the oldest organic produce distributor in the country, VVEG has unsurprisingly developed and maintained a business model that emphasizes strong relationships, internally as well as with growers and customers, at its heart.

Through transparency, deep relationships, collaboration, cooperation and clear communication, VVEG has succeeded in creating a business worthy of emulation. As a mission-driven company, every decision is guided by its belief that food is for people, not profit, and it should be accessible to all.

VVEG typically distributes fresh fruits and vegetables, eggs, dairy, dried beans and grains to a network of independent retailers, cooperative markets, restaurants and schools across California and into New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada and southwest Colorado. VVEG has even shipped products as far as Hawaii and New York. Throughout its business the company is dedicated to doing business without ever losing sight of the environmental impact it has on the communities it serves.

"Our founding idea was to give people an alternative to the large chain grocer model, to support farmers and to offer eaters

healthy, fresh foods at reasonable prices," asserts Mary Jane Evans, CEO of VVEG. "We consider the environment at the core of every decision we make."

Whether dealing with one of its major producers of year-round staples or a small seasonal grower of heirloom items, VVEG serves as a resource for farmers to help maximize annual yields

and find the best markets for a particular product. "We have a highly involved purchasing department that focuses on working with competent and ethical producers," says Evans. "They form lasting relationships with growers and often work together to come up with the most advantageous production plan possible."

Whether or not a grower sells exclusively to VVEG, purchasers will work with producers to establish exactly what kind of production scale is possible given a grower's

experience, soil type, climate and current market trends. In addition, VVEG can help growers find more ways to reduce environmental impact, because the company believes that being environmentally responsible should be taken into consideration along every part of the value chain. The company is certified as an organic handler by California Certified Organic Farmers.

Supporting Farmers and Staying Green

The company operates two warehouses at its San Francisco





headquarters, with 35,000 square feet and 10 coolers to keep produce fresh. VVEG has begun work on a third warehouse just up the block to increase storage capacity; the space will provide ripening areas for some of its fruits and vegetables.

Behind the scenes, VVEG has taken both small and large steps toward becoming a zero-waste operation by adopting new policies and initiatives. Over 99 percent of VVEG's waste is

diverted from landfills through recycling, composting and reuse. The company only uses nontoxic cleaning supplies, low-volatile organic compound paints and furniture made from renewable, reclaimed or recycled materials.

In 2009 the company installed a 560-panel, 106-kW solar electric system to one of its warehouses in San Francisco. The new system saves VVEG an estimated \$60,000 annually and will supply the operation with free electricity for at least 25 years.

VVEG constantly searches for viable alternatives to petroleum-based fuels and investigates small ways the company can have a big impact on fuel usage and efficiency. "We have always been very conscious about the fact that oil is not a renewable resource, and that anything we can do to increase our efficiency is imperative to doing good business," says Evans.

Among its smaller initiatives, VVEG enacted a company policy, even prior to the state's law, prohibiting drivers from allowing trucks to idle. The company constantly upgrades its truck fleet with the newest environmental technologies. "We are so ahead of the curve we often have to wait for technology to catch up with us," jokes Evans.



The attorneys of Sheppard Mullin salute our long time client Veritable Vegetable.

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More recently VVEG invested in six new hybrid trucks and a fleet of hybrid tractor trailers, resulting in big fuel savings. The new trucks are estimated to save 45 gallons of fuel for every 1,000 miles driven. In addition, the tractor-trailers have a 35-percent better fuel economy rate than standard models and zero emissions to boot. Considering that VVEG drivers drive over 1 million miles every year, the savings add up quickly.

According to Evans, the next major hurdle for the VVEG transportation department will be developing an integrated system to keep trucks fully loaded with cargo between stops. VVEG knows that if the trucks can stay full in every direction, the increased efficiency will translate into savings that ultimately trickle down to the consumer.

Going the Extra Million Miles for the Future of Food

In recent years VVEG has begun supplying local schools with fresh fruit and vegetables at or below cost to help support healthy eaters and education. “We are always excited and motivated to figure out how to enter these and other new communities and how to make this system viable,” asserts Evans.

The VVEG team is constantly looking for ways to evolve itself as markets change and evolve. Within the company VVEG

attempts to reduce the stress of physically demanding labor and staggers tasks to reduce injury and engage workers in different ways.

VVEG promotes a company culture dedicated to evening out the differences between entry- and executive-level compensation for the benefit of the entire company. One effort is keeping both executive and beginning salaries at a 5:1 ratio. VVEG also insists on paying above-market wages for all drivers and operational positions to attract the talent that keeps its food on the move. All staff members receive comprehensive training on sustainable agriculture and health and safety in the workplace to drive home the impact of VVEG’s business model and the company’s values.

“Our goal is to prepare this company to be successful in perpetuity and become a model of a business that operates with very small margins, but still manages to find enthusiastic, motivated and talented staff, and provides fair compensation,” explains Evans.

As the company continues to evolve, VVEG sets the standards for ethical business practices across market sectors. The company will continue to adhere to its goal of providing food for people, not for profit, allowing Veritable Vegetable to bring fresh produce to the American table and serve as a model for socially and environmentally responsible businesses everywhere. •





LOCAL FOOD, FOR REAL

Food hubs: Sustainable agriculture's missing link

<https://grist.org/food/food-hubs-sustainable-agricultures-missing-link/>

By Nathanael Johnson on Feb 6, 2014

This is part of a series in which we're asking what pragmatic steps we can take to make regional food systems more sustainable. Last time we spoke with organic farmer Tom Willey



David Mattheson Photography

Bu Nygrens, director of purchasing for Veritable Vegetable.

A few years ago, I bought a little share in a dairy farm so I could receive my own portion of creamy Jersey milk. Each week I'd fish a heavy Mason jar out from under a blanket of tinkling ice cubes. It was delicious, and when it went off it only got better: mixed with scalloped potatoes, salt, and onions, the fermenting milk transformed in the oven into cheesy ambrosia.

But there was a big problem with this milk: It waited for me on the other side of town. It took me a little over an hour to fetch it by car. I know because I didn't have a car at the time, and so I'd rent a Zipcar and try to run the errand in under an hour. Then the farm

started asking for members to drive out regularly to do chores. That was too much for me. I bailed out and went back to buying milk at Safeway.

The experience taught me to appreciate the middleman — someone who, for a reasonable fee, handles the logistics and transportation. Middlemen get a lot of grief. There are thousands of ads that exhort you to “cut out the middleman!” From the outside, the middleman just looks like a barrier between the consumer and low wholesale prices. But for small food producers, having a middleman can dramatically expand the number of eaters who can buy their stuff.

Middlemen might also help farmers fill the missing middle of our food system. Right now we have big farms that move their food to market with industrial efficiency, and we have little farms that rely on dedicated eaters to drive out over the potholes, but we don't have much in between. In part, that's because those companies that efficiently move trainloads of grain to market think making a trip to pick up a dozen pounds of salad greens is, ahem, just radicchio.

For the past few years, people have been saying that there's a solution to this problem: food hubs. Food hubs are essentially big warehouses — with a fleet of trucks and a staff of marketing and logistics gurus, who can connect farmers to restaurants, stores, and school lunch programs.

The USDA has supported the idea, and now recognizes [227 food hubs operating around the country](#). Last fall, Rowan Jacobson checked the vital statistics on the food hub concept in a [piece for *Orion Magazine*](#). He found that, while some were thriving, many food hubs couldn't make ends meet:

“Almost all food hubs that meet the dictionary definition are not profitable,” says Amanda Osborne, who directs the conservation organization Ecotrust's FoodHub, an online dating service for wholesale food buyers and sellers. How could they be? They are competing in one of the world's most cutthroat businesses, which often operates on net margins of less than 1 percent, and they are trying to return more money to the farmers, operate on smaller scales, and provide additional social and environmental services.

When I started scanning the list of food hubs, one name jumped out at me: Veritable Vegetable. I'd seen this company's trucks long before I'd ever heard the term “food hub.” This meant, presumably, that Veritable had figured out how to make a food hub work long before the hype and the funders started making it trendy.

When I visited one of the company's warehouses — in an industrial section of San Francisco — co-owner Bu Nygrens confirmed my assumption.

“It seemed like an artificial term, that both foundations and government were fueling, for something that we'd been doing for 40 years,” Nygrens said.



David Mattheson Photography

Veritable Vegetable started in 1974. “It grew out of the leftist politics about economic equality, and the natural food industry’s demand for brown rice and tofu and crunchy granola and all that stuff,” Nygrens said.

Moving all that food required trucks, and refrigerators, and organizers. There’s nothing bucolic about this sort of thing. When I visited Veritable, I found myself in a warehouse filled with forklifts, pallets, and boxes. Everything beautiful and pastoral was hidden away inside those boxes. Nicole Mason, the community involvement manager, showed me from one refrigerated room to another. To see what’s remarkable about Veritable you have to look closely: You have to notice that, for many farms, the produce isn’t coming by the truckload, or even the pallet, but just a few boxes at a time.

In the years since 1974, Veritable has proven that the business of picking up just a few boxes of produce from farmers can be profitable. Big distributors probably could have provided the same service, but they had no incentive to take on the challenge. There’s a kind of inertia that develops with success. Why change things when you’re already making money?

That inertia provided a niche for Veritable, but it’s also been a frustration. For instance, the company couldn’t convince any truck manufacturers that it would be worthwhile to build fuel-efficient hybrid semis.

“We wanted hybrid trucks 10 years ago and the tech wasn’t there,” Nygrens said. “It was only when Coca-Cola demanded a green fleet that [the truck company] Kenworth came up with the equipment, and then we could get the equipment.”

Within four years, savings on fuel more than paid for the new trucks (it was more like two when you count the money from tax credits). But even though these changes made

economic sense, not everyone is making them: Veritable stands out from the crowd. In 2012 a trucking trade magazine recognized the company for having the “green fleet of the year.” There are lots of smart, obvious changes like this that big food companies could make, Nygrens said, but change is hard: “They are very slow to react. They are behemoths. It’s hard to move them.”

So what are the next steps to move forward with more sustainable food? Despite her initial reaction, Nygrens says that more food hubs, and more people thinking hard about how to connect farmers with eaters, can only help. In the end, she said, the buzz is good because it gives the middlemen a little of the glory. “There’s not a lot of romance in moving boxes of food around,” she said.

Mason nodded. “Distribution might be the least sexy part of the food system,” she said. “One of the challenges is attracting and retaining the most talented people.”

So the people at Veritable welcome the theoreticians preaching about food hubs, and the techies working on farm-to-table apps.

Another challenge, Nygrens said, is educating eaters. For instance, Veritable found that people just wouldn’t buy dirty carrots — they looked bad, even if they were better quality. And farmers couldn’t afford to buy carrot washers. In the end, Veritable decided it had to get the bulk of its carrots from the bigger farms, that could wash their carrots. If eaters are willing to budge on this sort of thing, and learn when great flavors are hidden behind aesthetic imperfections, it would be a huge boon to farmers, Nygrens said.

She’d recently heard an apple farmer from New Hampshire named Michael Simmons wax lyrical on weird-looking fruit: “He said, a blemish on an apple indicated that the tree was healthier because it was able to withstand the attack. So people should be educated that the fruit itself was heartier, healthier, with more nutritional density perhaps, and I was like, wow! I mean, I’ve been in ag for a long time and I never ... yeah!”

At the same time, there’s an opportunity for farmers and their allies to invent cheap technical solutions to these problems. Perhaps there’s an inexpensive way to wash carrots, or a way of cooperating to share equipment.

At the end of the interview, I told Nygrens and Mason about my misadventures with the milkshare. It was a hassle, I said, but sometimes the hassle was part of a richer experience. For instance, I organized with a couple people who lived nearby to take turns picking up the milk. It was a logistical tangle, but it also allowed for some human connection that wouldn’t have happened otherwise. That led to the formation of friendship that I truly value.

In return Nygrens offered a similar story, about a community supported agriculture farm that worked with Veritable to deliver produce. It wasn’t an efficient system: The farm packed up the food in bulk, and families came to the warehouse to pick it up. “The

kids would be running around the warehouse, it was just like a little mini festival, and I loved that they would take all the food even if it had a little bug damage or something. We need more of that.”

On the one hand we want to make this as easy as possible, to allow people with less money and time to participate and get good food; but on the other hand, if you just reduce everything to time and cost, something is lost.

Food hubs promise to reduce transaction costs and bring good food to more people. But sometimes the costly transactions themselves are what make alternative food systems special, Nygrens said. The people behind Veritable Vegetable spend a lot of time thinking about how to strike that balance.

THE URBANIST



Food
It's Not Just What's
On Your Plate.



Between the Farm and the Grocery Store

Summary: San Francisco's food and beverage manufacturers and distributors provide a critical link between agricultural producers and consumers in the local food economy and support economic and employment diversity within the city. Recognizing the food industry cluster's importance, city agencies and industry leaders are developing recommendations for how local government can better help these businesses start, stay and grow in the city.

Bolstering San Francisco's Food Industry Cluster

By Eli Zigas

Like most major American cities, San Francisco is home to numerous food and beverage manufacturers and distributors that provide a link between agricultural producers and the public. During the past year and a half, many of the city's larger food industry businesses have made big moves. Whole Foods moved its Northern California distribution facility from San Francisco to Richmond. TCHO Chocolate announced it would be leaving Pier 17 for more space in Berkeley. And Del Monte Meats, which was founded in San Francisco in 1927, moved just south to Brisbane.

Yet, during the same period, other businesses decided to expand their footprint within the city. The San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market broke ground for a new building that will add 84,000 square feet of warehouse space. Marin Sun Farms moved into a larger meat processing facility in SoMa. United Cold Storage transferred its operations from South San Francisco into the Bayview district. And Magnolia Brewery began the build-out of its new brewery in Dogpatch. Why is there so much movement, and why does it matter?

The location decisions of these food manufacturers and distributors are notable not only for the industry, but also for the city as a whole. San Francisco has been a pioneer in promoting the practice of eating locally and organically and has earned a global reputation for it. Many of the city's restaurants attract tourists

and business by highlighting their use of products sourced from the Bay Area. But few of the restaurants, caterers, and grocery stores selling local food buy it directly from the farmers who grow it. Instead, they rely on food distributors and manufacturers, many of them clustered in the southeastern section of the city, to manage the complicated logistics of coordinating with dozens of producers to deliver the right quantity of product at the right time. The past and future growth of the local food economy, and all the benefits it provides to the Bay Area, depend on these behind-the-scenes businesses.¹

The business success of food manufacturers and distributors is important to maintaining a diversified economy in San Francisco. According to an analysis by BAE Urban Economics that will be published in a forthcoming study, these food and beverage businesses provide 5,000 jobs, which represent one quarter of all the manufacturing and distribution jobs in San Francisco. The number of jobs in the sector decreased steadily until 2006 and has leveled off since then (Figure 1). While this sector represents a small portion of the city's total employment, these jobs are especially noteworthy because many pay relatively well for positions that don't require college degrees. On average, workers in San Francisco's food manufacturing and distribution sectors earn between \$30,000 and \$56,000 annually, while the average

Eli Zigas is SPUR's Food Systems and Urban Agriculture Program Manager

¹ For more details about how a local food economy benefits the Bay Area, see our 2013 report "Locally Nourished," www.spur.org/locallynourished

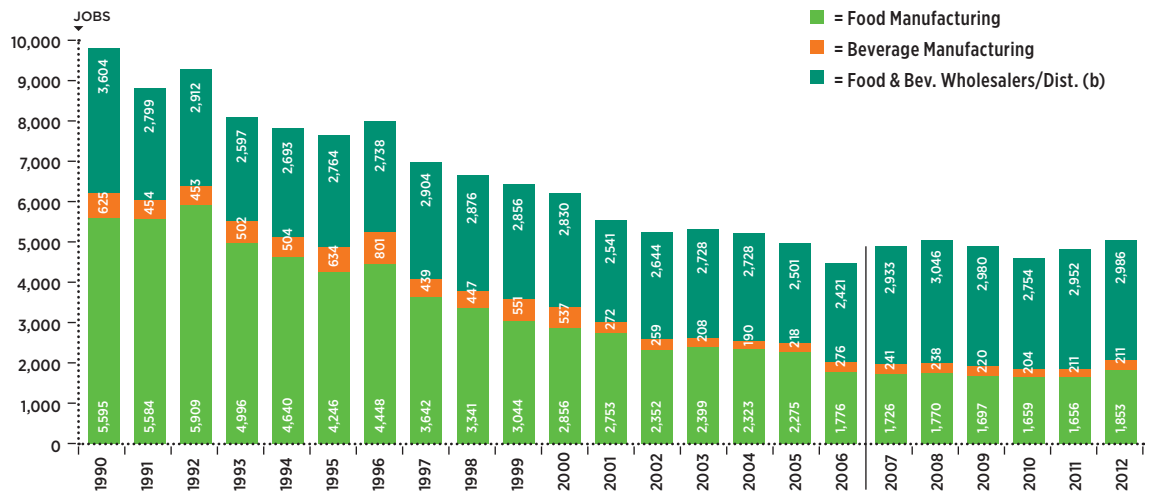


FIGURE 1:
San Francisco Food and Beverage Production & Distribution Employment, 1990-2012

As shown above right, the number of jobs in the food and beverage manufacturing and distribution sectors declined steadily until 2006 and has leveled off since then. The 5,000 jobs provided by these food businesses represent one quarter of all the manufacturing and distribution jobs in San Francisco.

annual salary in the city’s beverage manufacturing and distribution sectors ranges between \$80,000 and \$100,000.²

The fact that employment remained steady, and even grew, despite the recent recession is a good example of the value the city gains by having a diversified economic portfolio. Or, put another way, food and beverage makers and movers help keep San Francisco from putting all its eggs in one basket — to the benefit of us all.

Recognizing the importance of the food and beverage manufacturing and distribution sectors to both the broader food industry and to the city as a whole, the San Francisco Planning Department, Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD) and SPUR launched a food industry cluster study in August 2013. For the last 10 months, these three organizations along with a steering committee of local food business leaders and city agency staff have been working to identify the needs and challenges of existing food and beverage makers and movers and develop a strategy that could help them start, stay and grow in the city. (The city is planning to publish the full findings and strategic recommendations this summer.)

Through interviews, surveys and an industry convening that reached more than 70 business owners, the food industry cluster study found a set of key challenges facing the food and beverage sectors. Foremost among them is that businesses find it very difficult to find industrial space in San Francisco that meets their needs at a price they can afford. There is very little vacant space with the existing infrastructure for manufacturing or distribution (such as loading docks, floor drains and refrigerated space) and it’s costly to add these features into existing buildings or to build from the ground up. Currently, according to the nonprofit SF Made, lease rates in San Francisco for manufacturing space range from \$0.65 to \$1.40 per square foot per month for large buildings greater than 10,000 square feet and \$1.65 - \$3.00 for smaller manufacturing spaces, depending on location, size,

and existing features. In contrast, many businesses reported finding significantly lower rates in parts of the East Bay.

In addition to space costs, businesses are finding it increasingly difficult to retain their workers as housing costs continue to rise. In numerous interviews, business owners noted that they have seen more of their employees moving farther from San Francisco to find affordable housing, which increases the workers’ commutes and cost of living, and makes employee retention more difficult. This problem is exacerbated in many cases by workers having few transit options to get to work — especially in the early morning, late at night, or for jobs in the southeastern part of the city that are not easily accessible by transit.

The challenges of doing business day-to-day in the city were also cited by many business owners. This includes problems ranging from navigating regulatory issues to finding legal parking while trying to make deliveries to customers. While these issues are not unique to San Francisco, because they add expense they do influence where businesses want to locate their operations. Despite these difficulties, many companies still choose to stay in San Francisco. When asked why, in a survey conducted by SF Made as part of the city study, business owners’ most common reasons were to be close to customers and to maintain brand value by associating their business with its San Francisco location.

The strategy that will be published this summer by the planning department and OEWD will include detailed recommendations for how city agencies can help businesses surmount the various challenges they face. One set of recommendations will seek to increase the supply of industrial space suited to food manufacturing and distribution. An option under consideration is leasing public land or existing public facilities to food businesses. This is a strategy that is already familiar to the city. For example, the Port of San Francisco leases space to more than a dozen seafood processors and wholesalers, many of them

² Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 2012 data for San Francisco County.

FOOD CLUSTER



Photos: Joel Pujatti, courtesy of San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market (produce); Sergio Ruiz (blackboard)

↑ San Francisco's food distributors, many of them clustered in the southeastern section of the city, manage the complicated logistics of coordinating with dozens of

producers (listed on Veritable Vegetable's blackboard, above) to deliver the right quantity of product at the right time to local restaurants, caterers, and grocery stores.

located at Pier 45. Another model is the San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market. In 2012, the Board of Supervisors renewed its lease with the Market for a 60-year term and approved its plans to build a new facility and make significant capital improvements to its existing warehouses. Both Pier 45 and the Wholesale Produce Market provide models of how the city can directly provide space for food manufacturers and distributors.

Another recommendation under consideration would have the city create a liaison position to provide technical assistance and business support to the food industry sector. The liaison would track and help resolve regulatory issues, provide information on existing financing assistance, link the businesses with workforce training programs and generally help facilitate business-to-business matchmaking.

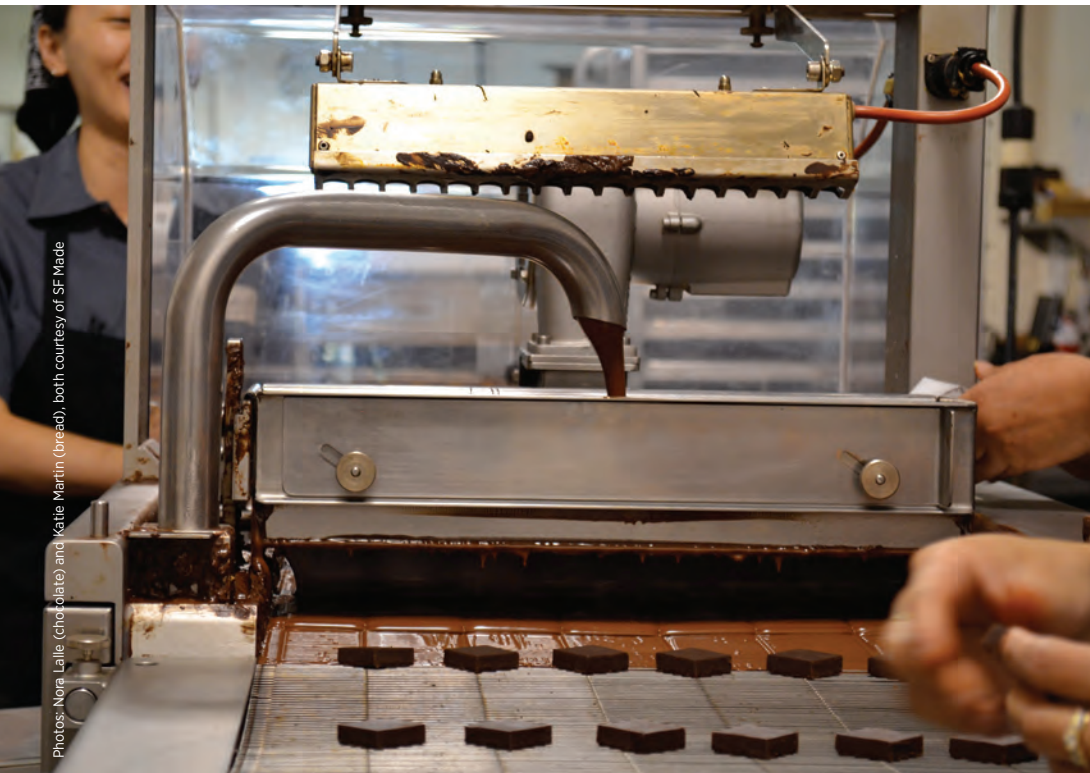
Two other areas of focus for the recommendations include transportation and workforce development. On the transportation side, the project team is researching ways that would make it easier for workers to get to and from their jobs using transit, as well as policies that would support smoother movement of goods and deliveries on city streets. On the workforce side, potential recommendations include developing training programs tailored to the

needs of food industry employers and more actively linking businesses with existing workforce programs and tax credits.

Taken together, the strategy's recommendations all aim to make it easier for food manufacturers and distributors to get started and build their businesses within San Francisco. The big changes in the past couple of years show that the city faces challenges holding onto some of its businesses, but also continues to be an attractive place for others. Broad market trends, especially the affordability of industrial space suitable for food businesses and of housing, will likely play increasing roles in the decisions of where businesses choose to operate. Policymakers have the ability to influence or lessen the impact of some of those trends and the forthcoming strategy will provide a series of recommendations for how to do just that. In the end, the strategy recognizes that supporting food manufacturing and distribution businesses supports economic diversity, economic development and strengthening the regional food system. ✨

The Food Systems and Urban Agriculture Program is generously supported by the Columbia Foundation, Clarence E. Heller Charitable Foundation, 11th Hour Project, TomKat Charitable Trust, Seed Fund and Clif Bar Family Foundation.





Photos: Nora Lale (Chocolate) and Katie Martin (bread), both courtesy of SF Made



↑ The city's diverse food manufacturers — including chocolatiers (such as Recchiuti Confections, above), bakeries (e.g. Panorama Baking Company, above),

breweries, and more — sell to both global and local markets while contributing to the city's economic diversity.

↓ In 2012, the Board of Supervisors renewed its lease with the San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market for a 60-year term and approved its plans to build a

new facility and make significant capital improvements to its existing buildings (pictured below). Architectural rendering by Jackson Liles Architecture.



www.veritablevegetable.com / HQ: San Francisco / Employees: 135 / Specialty: Organic produce distributor / Mary Jane Evans, CEO: "Close working relationships is what we have practiced since day one."

Industry Shapers

Veritable Vegetable prides itself on being a thought leader of the organic produce industry and demonstrating its values in every part of its business. **BY JANICE HOPPE**



Veritable Vegetable's owners (clockwise from left) Mary Jane Evans, Karen Salinger and Bu Nygrens believe in operating the business for the greater good.

Veritable Vegetable has been a leader in the distribution of organic produce distribution for more than 40 years. What makes the company unique is that it continues to shape the industry while staying true to the core set of values it was founded upon. "We consider ourselves a social enterprise that uses the power of business to solve social and environmental problems," says Bu Nygrens, co-owner and director of purchasing.

The San Francisco-based company was founded as part of a movement in the

mid-1970s that sought to bring low-cost, nutritious food to neighborhood co-ops and community storefronts. The collectives, called The People's Food System, extended throughout the greater San Francisco Bay Area and provided a large-scale alternative to the existing corporate food system.

At that time, more farmers rediscovered organic farming and developed new organic production techniques. Veritable Vegetable established relationships with many of these growers and began distributing produce beyond the origi-

nal People's Food System. The company invested in promoting sustainable farming practices and policies, and extending knowledge about organic food and agricultural issues.

Today, 60 percent of Veritable Vegetable's business is in the retail sector and of that about 40 percent is with co-ops. The company also works with restaurants, corporate campuses, meal delivery programs and universities. Its distribution area spans California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico and southwestern Colorado, and it ships to Hawaii.

"Through the years, Veritable Vegetable has been an integral part of change in the sustainable food system movement by stimulating an increased demand for fresh, organic fruits and vegetables, developing certification standards, working to pass food and agriculture legislation, helping to unify the produce community, and supplying healthy, fresh foods to communities all over California and beyond," Nygrens says.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The unifying principle of the People's Food System was "food for people, not for profit," and Veritable Vegetable embodies that by operating with the greater good in mind. It offers fair prices when buying, selling and hauling, and provides good wages, benefits and equipment to its staff. Veritable Vegetable was founded on the principles of collaboration, cooperation and interconnectedness that it maintains at its core today.

since day one,” she adds. “It’s a huge part of our reputation and growers talk about how they wish every distributor was like Veritable Vegetable.”

SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

To become more flexible when working with smaller farmers and customers, Veritable Vegetable purchased a fleet eight years ago that includes hybrid tractors and trailers and sprinter vans. “We are mitigating the impact of our trucks,” Mason notes. “We have received a number of accolades and awards for the hybrid technology we employ.”

As a Certified B Corporation, environmental sustainability is a major focus and Veritable Vegetable is proud to run the lowest emission equipment – producing near zero emissions – on the road while reducing fuel consumption and decreasing its carbon footprint. The company continues to research non-petroleum-based fuel options and other ways it can reduce its footprint. The purchase of the hybrid tractors and trailers increased fuel economy by 35 percent compared to non-hybrid semis.

At its warehouse, the company installed 560 solar roof panels that generate 34 percent of its electricity needs. Veritable Vegetable uses state-of-the-art temperature control technology and thick strip doors to ensure food stays fresh while reducing energy usage. Additionally, the warehouse has energy-efficient ballasts, fixtures and bulbs as well as motion and lumen sensors that detect movement and natural light to cut down on energy usage.

Veritable Vegetable has a robust food waste program where 99 percent of it is diverted from landfills.

“Any unsalable food goes to our employee food-buying club and to hunger relief organizations,” Nygrens says. “We’ve had a composting program for more than 20 years so that non-edible food isn’t wasted, either. We are very conscious of our waste management.”

IMAGES COURTESY OF DAVID MATHESON PHOTOGRAPHY



Veritable Vegetable has a number of loyal employees who have been with the business for more than two decades.

Sixty-five percent of Veritable Vegetable’s 135 employees are women, who also hold a number of upper-management positions, which the company says is outside the wholesale industry norm. “We try to flip a lot of the norms on their heads,” Community Involvement Manager Nicole Mason explains. “We believe in valuing the physical labor it takes to move food. To demonstrate this we pay our staff above the living wage in San Francisco.” The company also offers extensive benefits.

Veritable Vegetable prides itself on a well-blended staff in terms of gender and ethnic backgrounds. “It’s integrated and that just happened organically through our efforts to educate and bring people along from within the company,” Nygrens says.

Although Veritable Vegetable’s retention rate ebbs and flows because it attracts a younger workforce, the company does have a number of loyal employees who have been with the business for more than two decades. “I think we have a remarkable, stable staff,” says Karen

Salinger, co-owner and director of sales. “There are people who have been here for 25 years or more because we are a good company to work for, and we are happy about that.”

The company’s focus on quality relationships extends beyond its walls and has become part of its reputation in the organic trade. “We are known in the industry for paying farmers fairly for their products, paying staff fairly and charging a fair price,” Nygrens adds. “We have a lot of integrity in our produce and invest in those relationships.”

CEO Mary Jane Evans says the keys to long-term relationships with farmers and customers are transparency and taking a partnership approach. For instance, when working with growers, Veritable Vegetable focuses on production planning, understanding the constraints in a growing environment, discussing what works well and integrating that into the marketplace, keeping up with market changes and adapting as the weather impacts farmers’ produce. “Close working relationships is what we have practiced



IMAGES COURTESY OF DAVID MATTHESON PHOTOGRAPHY

Veritable Vegetable maintains its founding principles of collaboration, cooperation and interconnectedness.

BUILDING THE FUTURE

Because real estate is hard to come by in the Bay Area, Veritable Vegetable operates out of three warehouses within one block of one another. The company is in the process of adding 20,000 square feet to its 10,000-square-foot warehouse with the assistance of Hartland, Wis.-based ESI Group USA.

ESI Group is a nationwide single-source design-build expert that specializes in facility design, engineering and construction, as well as strategic logistics and material handling planning services for food facilities.

“I can’t say enough about these guys,” Evans says. “They spent time with us and gave us a tremendous amount of resources to understand what they do, learn about what we do and what our con-

straints are, and helped us build a first-class facility in a very small footprint.”

The state-of-the-art expansion is expected to be completed by the end of April. Veritable Vegetable’s additional warehouse space will be environmentally friendly with efficient refrigeration. Eventually, the company plans to put another solar field on the roof. The expansion will also stop the break in the company’s cold chain so it is continuously sealed off.

“It’s got all the things a good produce warehouse would have,” Evans adds. “We loved ESI’s approach and they have been great. They made it affordable and are like us – offered a fair price, told us what was going to go on so there were no surprises and worked in partnership with us.”

Moving forward, Veritable Vegetable has its sights set on building a 100,000-square-foot space where like-minded food businesses can co-locate and share resources. “To find a building that size with truck and customer parking in a city that’s cinched for space in every direction is challenging, but we’re hopeful,” Salinger says.

Veritable Vegetable plans to continue its model of business over the long-term and will develop a succession plan in years to come with the current staff. “We want to continue to be a regional distributor in our area and continue to provide good food and raise the bar as we go forward,” Evans says. “We are hoping what we have achieved over the past 40 years will continue to evolve and be a model going forward.” □



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Mar 15 · 8 min read

The Women-Owned Produce Distributor Selling 'Food for People, Not for Profit'

San Francisco's Veritable Vegetable Baked Its Values Into Its DNA

"We're focused on changing the face of the industry by leading by example."



Veritable Vegetable CEO Mary Jane Evans driving a Drexel in the company's warehouse. Photo by David Matheson Photography.

Organic produce distributor Veritable Vegetable is built from radical roots. Formed in the Bay Area in 1974 during an era when food-buying clubs were first being established, Veritable Vegetable focused on getting good food from trusted sources, paying people fairly along the supply chain, and selling at affordable prices. "Veritable Vegetable stepped in as the distributor, the link between farmers and the buying clubs," says Nicole Mason, director of community engagement at the B Corp. "We have changed a lot in 43 years, but the commitment to

support small and mid-sized farms has never wavered. We've always worked to create a democratic workplace with gender and pay equity. We're really being true to how we started.”

The vast majority of the 300-plus farms Veritable Vegetable works with remain those small (fewer than 50 acres) to mid-sized (50 to 300 acres) farms. While Veritable Vegetable also works with larger farms—including some of the biggest organic vegetable farms in the world—the company has remained committed to performing the necessary logistical dance of picking up from multiple shipping points and delivering to multiple customers, many of whom are small retail locations.

Veritable Vegetable is unique in the organic trade in other ways: A little more than half of the company's employees are women, and 100 percent of its executive management and all of its owners are women. By comparison, in a 2013 look at the trucking industry, 200,000 of the more than 3 million truck drivers were women, a figure that represented a 50 percent increase since 2005. And in 2017, when *Fortune Magazine* released its Fortune 500 list, only 32 of the companies, or 6.4 percent, were run by female CEOs.

Veritable Vegetable's values have not developed by chance. From owning their own fleet to remain nimble enough to meet the needs of multiple, smaller suppliers and their more than 500 customers to developing robust hiring and training programs to increase and maintain a diverse workforce, Veritable Vegetable has been thoughtful in how it built its business. By certifying as a B Corp and completing the legal steps to become a California benefit corporation, Veritable Vegetable's values are built into the company's operating procedures, employee handbooks and bylaws. Its mission is baked into the company's DNA.

. . .

Benefit corporations like Veritable Vegetable are redefining the corporation to legally balance purpose and profit. [Learn more.](#)

. . .

We spoke with Mason to learn more about how Veritable Vegetable is bringing its values forward after nearly half a century of operations and growth, and how the company is working to provide opportunities for women at all levels of the company's operations even as it grows its workforce.



Director of Community Engagement, Nicole Mason

What practices have you implemented to encourage women to work with Veritable Vegetable, despite operating in a male-dominated industry?

Veritable Vegetable honors and respects all staff and concentrates on providing access and training to women in many work applications, including hands-on highly physical work, like driving heavy equipment, managing operational and IT systems, and sitting in leadership positions. There is a real effort to bring, oftentimes, women into roles that are traditionally held by men. At a lot of companies, they want to hire drivers who already have experience with warehousing, for example. We don't necessarily require that. We have a robust training program and bring people into the fold that way.

Today, Our IT manager is a woman, our trucking manager is a woman, our warehouse manager is a woman. Distribution is a very male-dominated industry, as is truck driving. I don't think you can fall into what we've established—there must be some intention around it. If you're only going to hire people who have experience, then you're going to look like the rest of the industry.

Why did you pursue B Corp certification?

We are thought leaders and industry leaders, and we have been out in front—from greening our truck fleet, to paying a livable wage with excellent health insurance, to installing solar panels on our warehouse. We don't wait for shifts in thinking or for regulation change to do something. When the B Corp certification got off the ground, it was a great way to demonstrate our values publicly. We also appreciate that the verification process is completed by a third party. The certification provides us with another way people can recognize our social and environmental values at a quick glance.

We are always looking for ways to communicate our commitment to sustainability and people. We put our B Corp logo all over our materials, on the sides of our trucks, and at the front desk—it is relatively new and we are surprised by how many people ask about it. It's a certification that ties all of what we do with the farmers, the environment, and workers into one logo and assessment. The B Impact Assessment process has been good for us, because it has helped us in writing procedures, finding ways to truly measure our impact, and in honing our reporting.

Being a B Corp also makes us part of a network of other businesses trying to demonstrate those commitments as well. We can find anything from office products to t-shirts for schwag through the network of other companies that we can work with because of being a B Corp. We have stringent procurement policies, and it helps us immensely to have more people who are in line with our values to work with. The other benefit is the intangible part of joining a network—the, what I call, “rah-rah” part, where we realize we aren't alone in how we operate. The B Corp community is especially refreshing because it's not specifically food focused—we aren't spinning around with the same farmers, distributors, co-ops, we are usually in conversation with. We

are happy to be celebrating successes and being part of a broader movement that is really refreshing and invigorating.



A Veritable Vegetable employee in front of some of the company's truck, showing off strawberries ready for delivery.

What was the process to become a benefit corp and why did you pursue this step?

Becoming a benefit corporation was the obvious next step in terms of baking our commitments into the DNA of our business. Changing our bylaws, etc., so that no matter what happens with the future of the company, our commitments are unwavering. It's like succession planning in the bylaws.

We had to do no convincing within the company leadership to make this choice. In terms of extra work—it wasn't really that much. We had to bring in our lawyers and handle administrative details. We are putting together our second annual report, which is a good exercise in telling our story, finding areas to continue to improve and areas where we are succeeding.

In your work as a distributor, what advice do you have for burgeoning food hubs and independent distributors as they get started?

We mentor food hubs and invite them to come to our facility for training and interaction with our different departments. We have been connected with the Wallace Center for Sustainable Agriculture, who are doing a lot of market-based change initiatives, specifically around food hubs. First, the thing we all know about food and agriculture, is it requires a local solution: What makes sense in Kansas isn't always what makes sense in Watsonville.

In working with others, we get quickly to the values piece: How are you going to set things up to pay farmers and staff fairly? How does that result on the other side—you won't necessarily be the cheapest wholesaler on the market because you will charge what's fair. We talk a lot about our environmental efforts and how to be mindful about how you move food from point A to point B, what kind of trucks and fuel you are using, what technologies you are using. We also have experience with bootstrapping and working without a lot of capital, so we help others ask: How are you going to use your equipment; what are inexpensive things you can do to run more efficiently?

We recommend looking to find ways to be recognized for your efforts in a more public arena, like how we are a B Corp and we also just became a San Francisco Green Business. These things help put you on the map so to speak and help potential suppliers and customers find you in new ways.

What's next for Veritable Vegetable?

We have been at about the \$50 million mark in revenue for a handful of years now, and the last couple of years have been a wild ride. Brick-and-mortar stores are starting online apps and increasing their online sales. Online sites, such as Amazon, are acquiring brick-and-mortar stores, like Whole Foods. We sell mainly to retail stores, so we're seeing a lot of change.



Though produce sales are increasing all over the U.S. and here in California, we're seeing a lot more competition, as huge retailers sell more organic produce. We're seeing massive consolidation on both the grower and retailer side, and as a result, the cost of goods for certain products is decreasing.

We remain agile and we've seen other times in our history where things have been turned on their heads, but we're adjusting to the changing landscape. We aren't fully sure yet where things are headed, but we know across the country, independent wholesalers are seeing these trends. Everyone is doubling down and trying to be efficient and agile, and we are all watching the industry right now.

For us, we're being clear about how we operate our business and we are figuring out new ways to communicate about our unique model. We are getting better about how we tell our story. There aren't many companies in our part of the industry that are as committed as Veritable is to these values. I personally feel very lucky to be part of a team with such integrity.

. . .

B the Change gathers and shares the voices from within the movement of people using business as a force for good and the community of Certified B Corporations. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the nonprofit B Lab.

Filing Date: April 17, 2019
Case No.: 2019-006250LBR
Business Name: Veritable Vegetable
Business Address: 1100 Cesar Chavez Street (Primary Address)
Zoning: PDR-1-G (Production, Distribution & Repair – General) Zoning District
80-X Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 4316/002
Applicant: Nicole Mason, Director of Community Engagement
4200 18th Street, Suite 102
San Francisco, CA 94124
Nominated By: Mayor London Breed
Supervisor District: Located in District 10
Staff Contact: Shelley Caltagirone - (415) 558-6625
shelley.caltagirone@sfgov.org
Reviewed By: Tim Frye – (415) 575-6822
tim.frye@sfgov.org

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

Veritable Vegetable, the oldest organic produce distribution company in the country, has been an industry leader in the organic trade for over 45 years. Veritable Vegetable formed in 1974 out of a movement that sought to bring low-cost, nutritious food to neighborhood co-ops and community storefronts. This group of collectives, called the People’s Food System (PFS), extended throughout the greater San Francisco Bay Area and provided an alternative to the existing corporate food system. Their tagline at the time was, “Food for People, Not for Profit.”

There were many collectives that represented different parts of the food system – dry goods, baked goods, dairy, etc. Many PFS support collectives were located in a warehouse located at 3030 20th Street in San Francisco. The founders of these collectives had a unified vision: to create a viable alternative food distribution system that would eventually replace the corporate food system. In December of 1974, four individuals began to focus on buying and selling produce, calling themselves the “Veritable Vegetable Collective.” With a small staff, Veritable Vegetable was one of the first wholesale buyers to form direct relationships with local growers to bring organic produce to urban consumers in Northern California. Like most of the People’s Food System supply collectives, Veritable Vegetable was a worker-run collective where all workers made business decisions jointly. There was no formal ownership structure at that time.

In 1977, the PFS fell apart, but Veritable Vegetable embarked on its own and moved to 233 Industrial Street. Over the next several years, Veritable Vegetable grew its operation to better meet farmers’ needs and to serve the expanded demand for organic produce. Over the years, the company shifted ownership structure several times, but generally continued to operate with collective decision-making responsibilities. The company now operates out of four sites, several on Marin Street, but maintains its offices on Cesar Chavez.

The business is located on the north side of Cesar Chavez Street between Tennessee and Minnesota streets in the Potrero Hill neighborhood. It is within a PDR-1-G (Production, Distribution & Repair – General) Zoning District and within an 80-X Height and Bulk District.

STAFF ANALYSIS

Review Criteria

1. *When was business founded?*

The business was founded in 1974.

2. *Does the business qualify for listing on the Legacy Business Registry? If so, how?*

Yes. Veritable Vegetable qualifies for listing on the Legacy Business Registry because it meets all of the eligibility Criteria:

- i. Veritable Vegetable has operated continuously in San Francisco for 45 years.
- ii. Veritable Vegetable has contributed to the history and identity of San Francisco and the Potrero Hill neighborhood.
- iii. Veritable Vegetable is committed to maintaining the physical features, craft, art form and traditions that define the business.

3. *Is the business associated with a culturally significant art/craft/cuisine/tradition?*

Yes. The business is associated with the tradition of fresh produce food systems and organic farming.

4. *Is the business or its building associated with significant events, persons, and/or architecture?*

No.

5. *Is the property associated with the business listed on a local, state, or federal historic resource registry?*

No. The property has a Planning Department Historic Resource status of "C" (No Historic Resource Present) as it was evaluated in 2015 and determined to be ineligible for listing as a historic resource.

6. *Is the business mentioned in a local historic context statement?*

No.

7. *Has the business been cited in published literature, newspapers, journals, etc.?*

Yes. Veritable Vegetable is referenced in many publications including, but not limited to: Arizona Daily Sun, B the Change, Bay City News, California Agriculture, Civil Eats, Contra Costa Times, Eater SF, Grist, MIT Press, New Hope Network, OPN Connect, PeakPlate, RSF Social Finance Fall Quarterly, San Francisco Chronicle, SF Gate, The Packer, The Produce News, TriplePundit, Trucker News and US Business Executive.

Veritable Vegetable has also been featured in Edible Magazine, FleetOwner Magazine, Heavy Duty Trucking Magazine, Ms. Magazine, WDI Magazine and Wholesale and Distribution International Magazine. Veritable Vegetable is mentioned in John Curl's book, "For all the People," Mark Kitchell's documentary movie, "Evolution of Organic," Shanta Nimbark Sacharoff's book, "Other Avenues are Possible," Joyce Goldstein's book, "Inside the California Food Revolution" and

Desmond Jolly's book, "California's New Green Revolution." In addition, Veritable Vegetable has made appearances on CBS KPIX, NPR's Marketplace podcast and Facebook's She Means Business Livestream.

Veritable Vegetable has won numerous awards throughout the years, including:

- 1992 SUSTIE (Sustainable Agriculture Award) from the Ecological Farming Association
- 1997 City of San Francisco Environmental Achievement Award
- 2005 Small Business Award from the San Francisco Bay Guardian
- 2008 Spirit of Organic Award from the Organic Trade Association
- 2010 San Francisco Small Business of the Year Award, and then-Mayor Gavin Newsom declared May 18, 2010, to be Veritable Vegetable Day
- 2012 Green Fleet of the Year from FleetOwner Magazine
- 2015 Women in Business Award from the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce
- 2017 Business Environmental Award from Acterra
- 2018 Ebbie Sustainability Award from the SF Chamber of Commerce; Outstanding Company from the Climate Collaborative and National Co+Op Grocers Association
- 2019 Top Green Providers Award from Food Logistics

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business

Location(s) associated with the business:

- 1100 Cesar Chavez Street (primary address)
- 1370 Marin Street
- 1380 Marin Street
- 1545 Minnesota Street

Recommended by Applicant

- The main warehouse on Cesar Chavez Street with orange and green façade, curved roof and canopied solar array
- Fleet of near-zero emission trucks with custom design by local artist Laura Parker
- Tradition as a values-driven organic produce distribution company
- Commitment to supporting organic farmers, increasing access to fresh produce, impacting food policy, and strengthening diverse communities

Additional Recommended by Staff

- None



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Historic Preservation Commission Draft Resolution No.

HEARING DATE: MAY 15, 2019

Case No.: 2019-006250LBR
Business Name: Veritable Vegetable
Business Address: 1100 Cesar Chavez Street (Primary Address)
Zoning: PDR-1-G (Production, Distribution & Repair – General) Zoning District
80-X Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 4316/002
Applicant: Nicole Mason, Director of Community Engagement
4200 18th Street, Suite 102
San Francisco, CA 94124
Nominated By: Mayor London Breed
Supervisor District: Located in District 10
Staff Contact: Shelley Caltagirone - (415) 558-6625
shelley.caltagirone@sfgov.org
Reviewed By: Tim Frye – (415) 575-6822
tim.frye@sfgov.org

1650 Mission St.
Suite 400
San Francisco,
CA 94103-2479

Reception:
415.558.6378

Fax:
415.558.6409

Planning
Information:
415.558.6377

ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR VERITABLE VEGETABLE CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 1100 CESAR CHAVEZ STREET, (BLOCK/LOT 1231/014) [PRIMARY ADDRESS]; 1370 MARIN STREET (BLOCK/LOT 4353/009); 1380 MARIN STREET (BLOCK/LOT 4353/010); AND, 1545 MINNESOTA STREET (BLOCK/LOT 4316/001).

WHEREAS, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has contributed to the City's history and identity; and

WHEREAS, the subject business is committed to maintaining the traditions that define the business; and

WHEREAS, at a duly noticed public hearing held on May 15, 2019, the Historic Preservation Commission reviewed documents, correspondence and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry nomination.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the **Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends** that Veritable Vegetable qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) as it has operated for 30 or more years and has continued to contribute to the community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the **Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends** safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions for Veritable Vegetable.

Location(s):

- 1100 Cesar Chavez Street (primary address)
- 1370 Marin Street
- 1380 Marin Street
- 1545 Minnesota Street

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- The main warehouse on Cesar Chavez Street with orange and green façade, curved roof and canopied solar array
- Fleet of near-zero emission trucks with custom design by local artist Laura Parker
- Tradition as a values-driven organic produce distribution company
- Commitment to supporting organic farmers, increasing access to fresh produce, impacting food policy, and strengthening diverse communities

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the **Historic Preservation Commission's findings and recommendations** are made solely for the purpose of evaluating the subject business's eligibility for the Legacy Business Registry, and the Historic Preservation Commission makes no finding that the subject property or any of its features constitutes a historical resource pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5(a).

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the **Historic Preservation Commission hereby directs** its Commission Secretary to transmit this Resolution and other pertinent materials in the case file 2019-006250LBR to the Office of Small Business May 15, 2019.

Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ADOPTED: