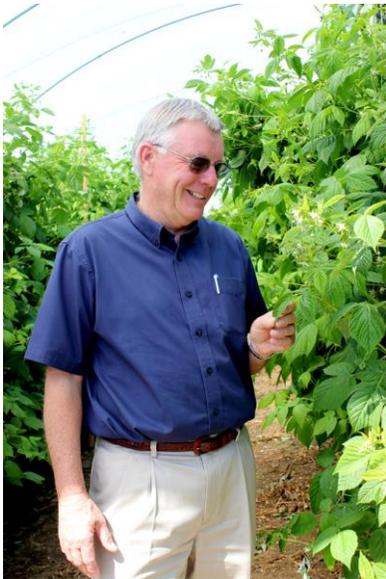


Amigos805

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President and CEO of Southland Sod Farms expands to State of the Art European-Style Berry Farm and helps to promote VC CoLAB

(OXNARD, Calif.) — Jürgen Gramckow, President and CEO of Southland Sod Farms, as well as Vice Chairman of the Ventura County (VC) Coalition of Labor, Agriculture and Business (CoLAB) definitely understands the value of preserving resources for future generations. His farming operation, which now encompasses over 2,000 acres in Ventura County, was started in 1970 by his German immigrant parents with just 50 acres.

“When we came over in 1950 I was two years old, my parents were penniless,” said Gramckow. They worked hard to save up money and weren’t averse to taking risks to build the business. “It is a family business along the German tradition, now run by Jürgen and his brother, Martin.”

Gramckow himself is no stranger to hard work, risk and business development. Noting the need for a grass variety better-adapted to the climate of Southern California, he and his research team developed Marathon Sod in 1983, which he says is much more suitable to the area as it uses 20% less water than the bluegrass commonly in use at the time. Marathon Sod has been the most popular lawn in Southern California for over 30 years.

Recently, the Gramckow’s expanded their operation to be one of the first in the United States to bring the ultra-efficient European style of raspberry farming to the Oxnard plain. Like their dedication to efficiently growing sod, they have found that growing raspberries in containers “European style” works far better than the traditional method of growing the bushes in the ground. The plants, some towering over 6 feet, are grown in pots lined with coconut fiber, which allows precise nourishment, disease protection and optimum health for the plants, resulting in higher yields and quality.

“It’s a very efficient way for plants to receive exactly what they need in water, fertilizer and along with our wonderful climate, we’re able to achieve rich, full deeply flavored fruit from uber healthy plants,” he explains. “You’re dripping water directly into the plant and there’s no big buffer zone of soil around it, which can create water and fertilizer waste. If it is a foggy, humid day we water less and a warmer day we water more, exactly what is needed – it is very efficient in many ways. Every plant is monitored 24/7 by both computers and our plant experts.” The fruit produced in his unique 60 acre berry patch goes directly to Driscoll’s for shipment to consumers near and far, even around the world.

Gramckow is also a board member and Vice Chair of CoLAB, a 501(c) 6 nonprofit organization of farmers, ranchers, business professionals and experts who work together to preserve and support a healthy and expanding economic base to enhance Ventura County’s economic vitality.

Innovation is a big part of Gramckow’s philosophy of business, but it’s difficult to innovate when dealing with bureaucratic red tape. “I find that so many times we’re up against regulations that make no sense,” he says, “and I just want to push back.” Gramckow had frustrations while trying to obtain permits for buildings or land use. He cites a current problem they’re having, trying to put up a fertilizer tank for his fuel-efficient raspberries. The county requires many expensive special soil tests and engineering reports to protect against potential threats such as earthquakes, however since the tanks are surrounded by 600 acres of his sod farm the extra red tape is unnecessary, costly and time consuming.

Gramckow insists he’s not insensitive to the need for conservation and environmental protection. He, like other area farmers, is most concerned about the “mountains of paperwork” that over-regulation can cause. That’s one of the main purposes of CoLAB, he says, to try to find solutions without such a huge burden of bureaucracy and complicated regulations. VC CoLAB combines the resources of local business people that are willing to help other agriculture, mineral, ranching and small businesses owners that are in danger of being adversely effected or even put out of business by over regulation. “The objective of VC CoLAB is to minimize adverse effects on our business and land values in light of the ever growing regulation.” said Gramckow.

Photo Cut Line: Jurgen Gramckow in his raspberry farm in Oxnard, Calif.

About CoLAB Ventura County

CoLAB Ventura County is a 501 c (6) non-profit organization, established to provide regulatory solutions for businesses and private property owners. Business owners and professionals, and property owners and other Ventura County residents with an interest in business and economic development are encouraged to join. Learn more about membership at www.colabvc.org/membership/.

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