

# PRESS RELEASE

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**For Immediate Release**

## **Ventura Companies Build Improved Celery Harvester**

### **Eco Ag Harvester: Celery Harvester and Crew Deliver Washed, Packed Produce on Clean Pallets**

The new Eco Ag Harvester cleans and packs three to four thousand cartons of celery a day without the produce ever touching the ground. The harvesters are produced in Ventura by Eco Power Systems builder/designer John Berry in conjunction with B&R Fabrication.

Able to operate all year in any weather, the harvester enhances the seasonal advantage of multi-season growers.

"This machine was born out of a collective effort of farmers, workers, and the builder and fabricator," said Berry.

The Eco Ag Harvester utilizes food quality stainless steel to deliver cleaner produce with less waste and with faster delivery, according to Berry. One feature is that boxes of celery move from field to store without moving from the pallet, saving time and resulting in fresher produce.

Another benefit will be reduced injuries for farm workers, as the machine automates much of the lifting required using the old system. Once this feature is demonstrated, Berry expects further cost-saving when workmen's medical insurance will go down.

"This machine is a collective effort of farmers, workers and the builder/fabricator," said Berry.

The first production model rolled out of the fabrication shop bay last March, with B&R V.P. Brian DeFisher at the wheel. He drove it under its own power on to a low-bed trailer; then took it onto an Oxnard celery field for Nuñez Farm and Jackpot Harvesting.

"The first day, once the machine hit the field, nine growers showed up to see what we're doing," said Berry.

The product launch has enabled B&R Fabrication to double its workforce, from four to eight, according to Roy DeFisher. B&R "can now fabricate the harvester in 90 to 120 days," he said.

Orders for the next two machines have been placed by Ben Vasquez of West Coast Harvesting, Inc, in Somis, and Aldo Castro of Castro Harvesting, in Gonzales, Calif.

Technically called a Track Hydrostatic Harvesting Machine, the diesel powered, self-contained harvester incorporates hydraulic technology to perform multiple operations under a range of field conditions.

Once in the field, two sections fold out to harvest 14 beds at a time, a 50 foot wide section.

"Farmers are great inventors. They know there is always a better way to do things, if they only had the time," said Berry. He developed the improved harvester from his experience serving the needs of local farmers, first as a Cat salesman and then as the owner of Eco Ag Systems, which designs and manufactures farm machinery.

"When you're in the field, you can see better ways to do it. It's a community. I've spent 30 years walking through many celery fields."

Berry is also the designer of an improved field loader, a modified Cat loader that carries four pallets from field to truck. His company has produced 75 in the last 20 years.

Berry was born and raised in Oxnard and attended Santa Clara schools from kindergarten through high school. He took Ag classes at Ventura Community College and Cal Poly, then served in the National Guard. After 15 years selling agricultural machinery, he formed Eco Power Systems.

B&R Fabrication is ten years old. They construct structural steel buildings, bridges, and custom machinery to spec.

**End**

### **Sidebars:**

#### **Eco Ag Harvester Improves Celery Harvest**

1. Get order in the morning
2. Eco Ag Harvester Goes to Field
3. Harvests celery, wash, bag, box, and load on pallets; from the moment of harvest, the produce, boxes, and pallets never touch the ground.
4. Pallets loaded in field
5. Drive to Packing House
6. Truck to Store the night they are picked
7. Depending on the contract and packager, the celery can be on the shelves in one or two days.

### **Benefits:**

Cleaner: reduces risk of E Coli

Fresher: from field to table in one day

Less waste: eliminates damage to produce and packaging,

Safer: Reduces worker injuries, and once this is demonstrated, the cost of insurance

End of day clean up is one hour, compared to three hours for field-workers using "the Hump" method

**"The Hump," traditional mode of celery harvest:**

1. Celery cut
2. Placed on ground
3. People on Hump (a wagon) are pushing cart and packing
4. Box placed on ground
5. Box hand-lifted and put on pallet
6. Loader carries pallets to truck
8. Truck goes to packing house
9. Truck transports to market

**End Sidebars**