

With weather, Furman risks the market

prayer and scripture reading.

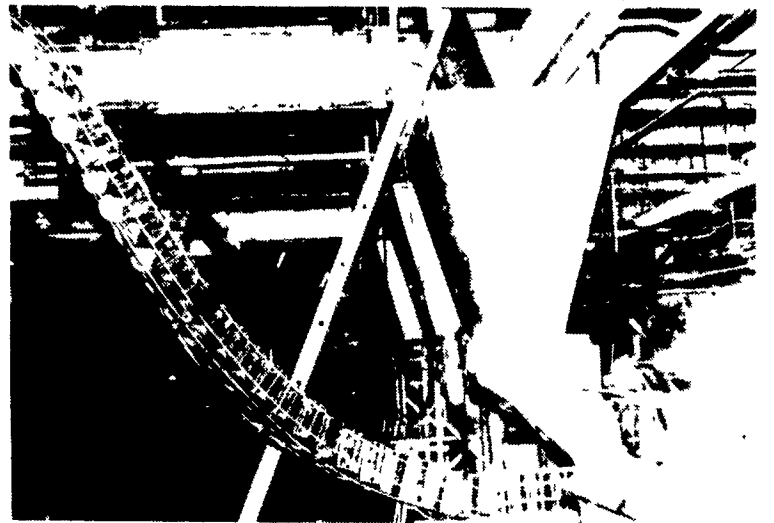
Geise explains, "We believe we operate with the help of God, and

that by His grace we continue to work together as a family. God is our coach and constant helper."

This reverence does not mean the firm is out of step. At a recent employee meeting, videotapes of



Completed products stand ready for labeling and shipping. After an order is received, cans will be labeled and shipped.



Cans are filled with baked beans in this production line at Furman Foods, Inc.

companies highlight with the "In Search of Excellence" book and television series were shown, and Geise notes, "We can stack up pretty well with the excellent companies."

Furman employees share in the company through a stock ownership plan. They are also invited to contribute suggestions for change and improvement.

"Our people are more than hands," Geise says. "They have good ideas. Ideas shouldn't come from management down. Our

people are more familiar with their jobs than management is. They know how to make the line work better or the crops grow better. We rely on them to tell us "

Geise characterizes the operation as "a marketing-run company." Top management works with five-year projections, and all crops are planned two years in advance with cooperation among the marketing, production, field, and sales departments.

Unlike some canneries, Furman Foods is a year-round industry. In addition to packing fresh produce in season, the firm does a large dry packing business with beans. Furman Foods employs 170 full-time workers and 350 part-time workers, in addition to growers.

The food business isn't always rosy. Geise points to competition from imports and the California market, which holds down food prices, costing both processors and growers money. A combination of low food prices and local difficulties made Furman Foods take a long, hard look at its business in 1982.

The Pennsylvania tax base wasn't ideal. Worse, the Department of Transportation had put a 12-ton limit on the road leading to the cannery and the Department of Environmental Resources was suggesting an expensive change to the firm's waste treatment facility.

For awhile, the industry debated moving out of state. But state and local agencies came together with the industry and ironed out most of the problems. (For example, a new road was constructed to the cannery through the cooperation of Furman, the Department of Transportation, county government, and the economic development council.) In 1983 the company made a renewed commitment to the area by launching its expansion program.

The commitment goes even further. Furman, for example, was one of eight state firms to promote Pennsylvania products at the recent NASDA National food and agriculture exposition in Kansas City, Mo.

"I'm an eternal optimist," Geise notes. "I think we have an excellent market for Pennsylvania agriculture if growers, processors and buyers continue to work together."

He adds that the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture is to be congratulated for its efforts in promoting Pennsylvania-grown produce.

"If everyone in Pennsylvania would buy Pennsylvania-grown and processed vegetables, we would have a tremendous market," he said. "I hope all farmers, not just our growers, will think about that when they go to the store. Farmers should be supporting their own industry."

John Wesley Furman seems to have prophesied such efforts when he once told his sons, "It's much easier to make a success when all those involved work together."

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