

Unappealing Banana Trucks

By Dorian Hargrove

On a Tuesday afternoon in June, Barry Jung, Dole Food Company's general manager of West Coast operations, drives

his white Ford pickup toward a green- and-black freighter.

Every Monday since 2002, when Dole moved its West Coast headquarters to San Diego, one of three Dole cargo ships has arrived just north of the Tenth Street Terminal loaded with pineapples and nearly 40 million bananas from Paita, Peru; Guayaquil, Ecuador; and Puerto Caldera, Costa Rica. In a year's time, more than 500,000 tons of fruit from Central and South America will enter the port.

Jung, a tall, slender man in his late 40s, stops alongside the 587-foot-long by 89-

city," says Jung.

In coming years, to reduce pollution, the state will require ships to turn off their engines when they dock — called cold-ironing — and use shore-based power instead. Jung says Dole is eager to comply. "We've recently applied for a federal grant to start the cold-ironing process, instead of waiting until 2014, when the state's mandate goes into effect," he says.

Five stories above the dock, 21 longshoremen bustle onboard, loading the ship for its voyage back to Latin



Alejandra Jaramillo

passes a newly constructed 60-foot-tall metal bay where an additional 120 containers can be stacked. "Our business is expanding," says Jung. "In times like these, people aren't buying flat screens; they're buying food and fresh fruit for their families."

He drives slowly between two rows of refrigerated containers loaded with fruit. Truckers from as far north as Canada and as far east as the Rockies drop off empty containers in the yard, exchanging them for new loads.

leasing Dole's can pick up the product.

At the gate, inspectors examine two Dole trucks that have just arrived, looking for damage that may have occurred on the trip. "All trucks are required to turn off their engines while they wait for inspections," Jung says. "We're averaging just over 20 minutes from the time after the incoming trucks are inspected to when they drive off the lot."

Jung is eager to point out other changes that Dole has



10th Street terminal

foot-wide freighter. "This ship arrived early yesterday morning with a full load — about 500 40-foot containers," he says. "And they are already almost finished reloading it with empty ones."

A loud, steady hum comes from the freighter's diesel engines, which run while the ship is in port. They power two Liebherr vessel-cranes, located in the center of the ship. "The engines are capable of producing enough energy to light up a small

America. Diesel yard tractors position the empty, four-ton containers on the dock. From inside their glass cabins, the two crane operators hoist the containers and stack them eight high — four below deck and four above — the entire length and width of the ship.

Jung puts his pickup in gear and drives east on the 22-acre site, toward an expansive, neatly kept lot with four rows of diagonally parked containers. On the way, he

"That's nearly a thousand truckloads a week, if you count arrivals and departures," says Jung.

On his way to the main gate, Jung passes a distribution warehouse run by San Diego Refrigerated Services. Outside on the loading dock, workers with pallet jacks move six-foot-tall crates of bananas into the building. Nearly 20 percent of the fruit is stored inside until companies that prefer to use their own containers instead of

implemented to lower diesel emissions. Since 2007, Dole has purchased 15 new diesel-powered yard tractors, retrofitted 710 generators used to refrigerate the containers, and worked to streamline operations, such as expediting the truck-inspection process.

"This has been a unique and challenging site for us," says Jung, "because of our proximity to nearby communities and to downtown."

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For many residents of Barrio Logan, it's what happens when the trucks leave the terminal that seems to affect their neighborhood most. More business for Dole means more traffic, noise, and pollution on their streets.

Each week, approximately 410 trucks loaded with fresh bananas and pineapples leave Dole's main gates and drive south on Harbor Drive. Most head for the 28th Street onramp to Interstate 5, beginning a trip that may cover thousands of miles. But for about 60 trucks, the trip takes only five minutes.

Making a left off Harbor Drive onto Sampson Street and then another left at Main, these trucks take their loads—a total of 1800 tons of fruit each week—to a small distribution warehouse in Barrio Logan, located across a narrow two-lane street from the Mercado apartment complex. Inside the warehouse, after unloading the Dole containers, workers divide up the product and sell it to other companies.

On a Wednesday morning, a blue semi hauling a Dole refrigerated container travels south down Main Street and stops 60 feet past the warehouse loading dock. A man with slicked-back hair and black sunglasses puts the truck in reverse, cranks the steering wheel, and swings the 40-foot trailer down the loading ramp. As the truck backs up, it blocks the entire street, coming within 2 feet of a row of diagonally parked cars.

In March, attempting to address complaints of heavy traffic, noise, and pollution

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from the semis, Dole representatives and port officials set up a staging area a few blocks south of the warehouse, adjacent to Cesar Chavez Park. Now the trucks wait there until space on the loading dock is available.

Tony LoPresti, director of the Toxic Free Neighborhoods, a campaign for the Environmental Health Coalition, regards this solution as inadequate. "We requested that distribution activities take place on the terminal, not in the community, and we pointed out that there are a number of serious issues related to the location of the Main Street warehouse," writes LoPresti in a June 17 email.

"Besides the health impacts of having idling diesel trucks a stone's throw from the apartments, these trucks were also lining up in the middle of Main Street, blocking traffic, making noise, hitting the cars parked at Mercado Apartments, and causing a nuisance."

Inside a two-bedroom apartment in the Mercado complex, Alejandra Jaramillo and her three-year-old daughter Erica sit on a green paisley couch in a small living room. A semi lumbering down Main Street fills the room with the smell of exhaust. The windows rattle slightly, and the vertical blinds sway from the breeze. Jaramillo waits for the truck to pass.

"It's gotten worse over the past few months," says Jaramillo in Spanish. "There are more trucks now. It used to be only Monday and Friday. Now they come every day except Saturday."

"Traffic is a problem. The trucks stop in the middle of the street with their engines running. There have been car accidents. And there are a lot of kids that live here and play outside, inhaling exhaust all day. It's not safe. My son has to stay in his room because he starts cough-

ing. He doesn't understand why."

Outside, another truck lumbers down Main Street. Once again, Jaramillo pauses.

"Normally we have to keep the windows closed, but there are times when it gets too hot and stuffy," she says as the beeping semi begins to back up. "Right when we open the windows we smell exhaust and hear the noise. No matter how often we wipe it down, there's always a layer of black dust around the windows and on the furniture."

Asked about neighborhood complaints, William Goldfield, Dole's communications manager, says, "We have been working with the community, as well as the port, to resolve any issues. This warehouse facility is zoned for this type of business, and all of Dole's equipment is within regulations of the State of California Environmental Protection

agency. We are currently in the process of handling our transfers has one of their own employees directing traffic so as not to cause congestion on the street."

The Port of San Diego set up a telephone hotline for residents to call with complaints, but, Goldfield says, not one person has called.

LoPresti of the Environmental Health Coalition says the hotline and staging area are "imperfect and partial solutions" that have "resulted in almost no improvement."

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"We think there are two tracks that we have to take," writes LoPresti. "A long-term solution is to be sure that the new community plan update does not allow warehouse and distribution centers in this area."

"On a more immediate level, we need to get Dole, the port, and the City of San Diego to do what they can to find an alternative to the Main Street warehouse. Fortunately, there is an immediate alternative. A vastly underutilized refrigerated warehouse exists on the terminal, which is run by San Diego Refrigerated Services. The warehouse was designed to distribute the fruit product being offloaded at the terminal. It should do just that. Dole does do some of their business through this warehouse. Early on there were folks saying that the warehouse was at capacity. That turned out to be completely inaccurate. The warehouse is actually quite desperate for more volume. Seems like a simple solution."

Asked about moving operations to the terminal warehouse, Bil Goldfield, a Dole representative, responded, "Although there may indeed be space capacity available at the warehouse, from a business standpoint the location does not offer the flexibility we require to operate efficiently." ■