



OCEAN MIST



## AG LEADERSHIP'S POSITIVE IMPACT ON BUSINESS AND EMPLOYEES

**OCEAN MIST FARMS HAS HAD A LONG HISTORY OF ENCOURAGING EMPLOYEES TO APPLY TO THE CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM.**

This tradition dates back to Class 3, when Ed Boutonnet became the first in a long line of Ocean Mist Farms employees to complete the program. Through the years, Ocean Mist Farms has encouraged many of its employees to apply to the program, and has supported them during many days away from the office and farm. Today, Boutonnet and his team recognize the profound impact Ag Leadership has had—both personally and professionally on the business and its employees.

The largest artichoke operation in the United States, Ocean Mist Farms has been in operation since 1924. Early on, a group of five partners set up business in a wood and tin shed at what was then

called Del Monte Junction. They leased some land about a mile south of Castroville and began raising artichokes and brussels sprouts. In these early days and through the late 30s, many ranchers had no electricity or telephone service, consequently much business was done by a handshake or through the mail.

Although things are very different today, Ocean Mist Farms still has a commitment to high quality and superior service. Much of that is dependent on employees, many of whom have gone through Ag Leadership in the program's 46 year history.

We spoke to six current and former Ocean Mist employees about their experiences and got their perspective about how the California Ag Leadership Program impacts both the business and the individual.



### Ed Boutonnet | Class 3

*CEO, Ocean Mist Farms*

The Boutonnet Family is in its third generation of farming and is active in the running of Ocean Mist Farms. Since the early 1980s, asparagus, cauliflower, celery, corn, fennel, green onions, leeks, iceberg lettuce, mixed lettuce, romaine hearts, rapini and spinach have been added to complete the menu at Ocean Mist Farms.

Ed Boutonnet was a member of Class 3, and even though it's been more than 40 years since he went through the program, he still feels the impact Ag Leadership had on him and his business.

"Ag Leadership helped us raise the bar in our organization," said Boutonnet. "We continue to support the program because of what it helped us do over the years."

Boutonnet says the program gave (and continues to give) him a different perspective on the world. For their international trip, Class 3 went to Japan, the Philippines, South East Asia and China.

"That trip was a real eye-opener for us in those days. In that time, the world wasn't as close as it is now—now with all the technology, it's like being across the street."

He describes the program as "life-changing" and lists it as one of the biggest moments of his life, "It's like getting married, going into the service... you have four to five life-changing events in your life, and for me, Ag Leadership was one of those events that made a huge difference in my life."

At the time he went through the program, Ed was a young man, just 33 years old and farming. Now, after completing the program more than four decades ago, Boutonnet says his confidence in the program is stronger than it has ever been. He continues to support and encourage those Ocean Mist employees who he believes should apply to and complete the California Ag Leadership Program. The benefits, Ed says, to the company and to the individual are immeasurable.



### Dale Huss | Class 19

*Sea Mist Farms, General Manager*

At the time Dale Huss went through the California Agricultural Leadership Program, he was a harvest superintendent for Sea Mist Farms. He had heard about the program, and thought it would benefit him personally and professionally.

"I talked to ownership about it, and they were very supportive of my decision to apply to Ag Leadership," said Huss. "The support of the ownership allowed for me to be gone and when I came back, I worked my butt off to get caught up."

One of the biggest lessons he took away from the program was exposure to issues facing agriculture in California and across the nation.

"I came out of the program more informed. When you're shoulder to shoulder with folks in the program, it takes you to the next level with dealing with people and issues from a broad variety of perspectives."

Huss says his experience in Ag Leadership has benefitted him greatly on both a personal and a professional level.

"Really the benefit is to the individual and to the organization because it takes you to another level professionally by exposing you to different situations you have not been exposed to before," said Huss. "It allows you to bring those experiences back and give you a new perspective moving forward."

In his personal life, Huss contributes a greater understanding for other people's opinions and beliefs to what he learned in Ag Leadership.

"I think probably just the understanding that people have a different perspective of things, and not jumping to conclusions right away, having an open mind and not rushing to judgement with people who have a different view than I do," said Huss.

Not only has Huss felt the impact of Ag Leadership on himself, but he also sees it in his coworkers who have also gone through the program.

"Their confidence was improved and they take on new leadership roles in the organization and in the industry."



### Art Barrientos | Class 24

*Vice President of Harvesting, Ocean Mist Farms*

When Art Barrientos started his career with Ocean Mist Farms, he began in the field as a truck driver and worked his way up the ladder to different positions. He's been with the organization for 40 years and now serves as Vice President of Harvesting.

In the early 1990s, Ed Boutonnet began encouraging Barrientos to apply. He had already known of several people who had gone through the program, and knew Barrientos would benefit greatly from the experience.

"Initially after being inaugurated, I felt intimidated," said Barrientos. "But as I got to know my classmates and develop confidence, I could begin to sense a change in myself."

He explains a feeling of being overwhelmed, but knowing that he had made the right choice by going through the program.

"Past graduates would ask me 'how do you feel?', and I'd say, 'you know, I can't answer that right now, ask me five years from now.'"

Looking back, Barrientos says that he clearly sees the impact the program had on his life.

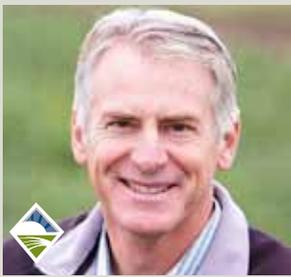
"It opened quite a few doors for me," said Barrientos. "I saw that I had the confidence to call someone in the industry and have a conversation about a certain subject— prior to my Ag Leadership experience, I would've hesitated to do that."

Like fellow alum, Dale Huss, Barrientos also noticed a change in individuals who have gone through the program.

"Without a doubt, you see a change after they've come out of the program," said Barrientos. "We push each other, we challenge each other and it's all good because it makes Ocean Mist that much better."

For Barrientos and his colleagues who have gone through Ag Leadership, he says working for Ocean Mist has become much more than just a job.

"Going through the program and being at Ocean Mist Farms, it's a lifestyle—it's what we've chosen to do."



**Joe Pezzini | Class 28**

*Chief Operating Officer, Ocean Mist Farms*

Joe Pezzini describes his Ag Leadership experience as having a “profound impact personally and professionally.”

Joe had looked at the program for years and knew several individuals, including Ed Boutonnet, who had encouraged him to apply for the program. Once he made the decision to apply, he knew that he had made an important investment in his own future and the future of Ocean Mist Farms.

“We have a unique perspective at Ocean Mist because of Ed, who went through program early,” said Pezzini. “He encouraged us and allowed us the time and flexibility to go through it.”

Joe says his Ag Leadership experience couldn’t have been scripted any better. When the spinach industry was faced with a food safety emergency, he was called on to answer media questions and even testify in front of Congress.

“I relied on my training while dealing with the media during a food safety issue,” said Pezzini. “I was an example of what Ag Leadership should be.”

“It’s life-changing for sure—it helped me develop as a leader, and I came out of the program with lots of opportunities to get involved and I took that in stride.”

Pezzini realizes the positive impact Ag Leadership has had on the business.

“Ag Leadership has had a big impact on Ocean Mist Farms,” said Pezzini. “We’ve adopted some best practices for being a good leader and have set a really critical tone for our organization.”

“It’s an investment in the future of the organization—we’ve had many people on the management team, who are helping to guide the organization, go through Ag Leadership,” said Pezzini. “It’s been a tremendous value for everyone involved.”



**Jeff Post | Class 32**

*Fleet and Equipment Supervisor, Valley Pride*

In 1993, Jeff Post began working in a shipping job for Ocean Mist Farms. He eventually moved into a marketing position, then quality assurance. He left the company for a short time and eventually went back to work on the sales team. When he returned to the organization, he had already started Ag Leadership and had the support he needed from Ocean Mist Farms to continue through the program and begin his new job.

“They were supportive of me going through the program from the beginning, but it was difficult,” said Post. “There’s a lot expected—from the program and from Ocean Mist. So I had to learn to balance my responsibilities while I was taking time away.”

Post relies on the skills he learned through Ag Leadership on a daily basis in his job.

“I’m borrowing from skills that I learned and employ these techniques when I’m dealing with people,” said Post. “Ag Leadership taught me to stay calm, never jump to conclusions and to be confident—I use that everyday. To be honest, I’m proud of this.”

Not only does Post recognize Ag Leadership’s impact on Ocean Mist, but he also sees that the program has benefited from the contributions of Ocean Mist’s employees as they’ve interacted with fellow classmates.

“It’s a symbiotic relationship with the success of Ocean Mist and Ag Leadership,” said Post. “Ag Leadership learned from us and Ocean Mist employees have had a positive influence on classmates and the program. I employ many of the strategies that I gained from my Ag Leadership training, even to this day.”

Ag Leadership gave Post the experience and leadership training he needed to excel on a professional level.

“For me, Ag Leadership and Ocean Mist Farms go together congruently,” said Post. “The program provided me with tremendous leadership opportunities and education that help me succeed in my work.”



**Jorge Suarez | Class 41**

*Former Director of Strategic Planning and Human Resources, Ocean Mist Farms*

For Jorge Suarez, a former employee of Ocean Mist Farms, the decision to apply to the Ag Leadership Program was an easy one. He had met with Ed Boutonnet, who encouraged him to do what he could to gain a greater understanding about the issues that impacted Ocean Mist Farms, even outside of agriculture.

Through his meetings with Boutonnet, Suarez realized that running an agricultural operation was dependent on understanding a wide spectrum of issues.

“As a farmer, if you close your eyes to the external pressures of business, you might as well close your business,” said Suarez.

After graduating from the program, Suarez challenged himself to leverage what he had learned and to make a serious impact on Ocean Mist Farms.

“After our national trip to Washington, D.C., I had an emphasis on immigration reform,” said Suarez. “I wanted to represent the ag community on a local, state and federal level and wanted to learn more about comprehensive immigration reform.”

Suarez says that being able to understand himself and make a “change from the inside out” better allowed him to focus on some of the issues facing Ocean Mist Farms and its employees.

“I was able to ask myself how I was going to impact the people at Ocean Mist Farms who are from another country,” said Suarez. “How can I use my knowledge and help the company move forward?”

While at Ocean Mist, Suarez was able to develop a program within the company which helped employees understand issues outside of agriculture.

“We had to make our employees more aware and understand issues,” said Suarez. “Things like relationships, leadership and issues that impact operations and management.”

In addition to helping his fellow coworkers, Ag Leadership helped build Suarez to the point where he was able to speak on behalf of the company.

“Univision started talking to me about labor issues. They would come to me and ask me about laws and issues that, had I not been trained through Ag Leadership, I wouldn’t have been as effective as I was able to be. I gained so much knowledge.”