

A SERIES OF PROJECTS EDUCATED THE OWNERS HOW TO EVALUATE MARIPOSA'S FINANCES, STREAMLINE THE HERB-PROCESSING OPERATION, AND HELP THE COMPANY FOCUS ON LONG-TERM PROFITABILITY

ABOUT MARIPOSA FARMS. Mariposa Farms started in Grinnell, Iowa, in 1995 as the first seedling of a new life. Owners Dave and Denise Conkling, seeking to move back to Iowa after some time spent in the New Mexico home-building business, were looking for a new venture that could combine Denise's botanical expertise with Dave's experience in greenhouses. Their idea was to attack a then-nonexistent marketplace in Iowa—providing fresh herbs to retail stores. Mariposa grew from three non-Conkling employees to 30. Today, shoppers in 15 states regularly purchase Mariposa herbs at stores like Walmart, HyVee, Fareway, and Price Chopper.

THE CHALLENGE. For many years, to put it mildly, Mariposa has been busy. "It's not a huge company, but it's different than I really expected it to be," Conkling said. "A lot of these things did creep up on us. Our management techniques, people skills—all of those things worked really well. But once we reached a certain size, they didn't work as well. It was just too much for us to do. Running everything else and then thinking through and having the time to make those kinds of long-term decisions. We really needed twice as much management, but we couldn't afford it."

The issue came to a head last year when 60-year-old Dave Conkling began thinking about what Mariposa would look like without him in it. The conclusion ultimately was that it needed to be better. The Conklings, who hope eventually to pass the business to their daughter, Colette Conkling, were actively looking for consulting help in various areas "to be better" when CIRAS account manager Brenda Martin happened to walk through the door one day.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. CIRAS, part of the MEP National Network™, since has worked with the Conklings to evaluate Mariposa's finances, streamline the herb-processing operation, and help the company focus on areas that will prove most profitable long term. In one step, CIRAS project manager Jim Poe helped Mariposa Farms create a separate quality employee role to sort the herbs before they were delivered to packaging employees. The new system meant that packagers were no longer delayed by sorting and replacing damaged herbs, freeing them to move faster and fill more orders. As a result, Mariposa's average production of 8,000 packages a day jumped to 18,000 and 24,000 during a few days in the company's busiest period last year.

Conkling, who plans to continue working with CIRAS experts for at least another year, couldn't be more pleased.

"Before, I kind of felt like the Lone Ranger, you know? Everything was on my shoulders. Now, I don't. It's kind of like I have the resources of a bigger company at a very reasonable cost."

-Dave Conklin, Owner

RESULTS



\$100,000 in improved productivity



Increased 7 jobs and retained 25 jobs



\$200,000 in new investment

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