



April, 2009

**To our Employees and Neighbors,**

**Questions about groundwater conditions in the Fennville and Allegan County area have raised concerns among residents, particularly those with private drinking water wells. Birds Eye Foods shares these concerns both as a long-standing member of the community and as a significant contributor to the Fennville economy whose operations depend upon available sources of water. For a number of years, we have been working with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) to assess groundwater conditions around our facility and in the Fennville area. We currently have pending before the MDEQ a proposed timetable for construction of a more than \$3 million plan to enhance our own water treatment system and as soon as we receive the required MDEQ approvals, construction will begin.**

**In addition to updating you on the status of our efforts with the MDEQ, we wanted to take this opportunity to tell you more about Birds Eye Foods and our Fennville operations so that you will have the facts concerning this situation.**

#### **Who we are**

**Our Fennville facility is one of Birds Eye Foods' eight facilities located across the U. S. Birds Eye is a privately-held U.S. company whose core business is in branded frozen vegetables and meals, pie fillings and toppings, chili and chili ingredients, salad dressings and snack products. We employ 1,700 full-time employees.**

#### **Our Fennville, MI Facility**

**At our facility in Fennville, we produce canned fruit fillings and glazes, canned apple juice, and baby corn in glass jars. We employ approximately 140 Fennville area residents full-time and another 140 Fennville area residents on a seasonal basis during the summer and fall fruit production months. In total, we pay more than \$5 million in wages and benefits each year to our employees who live in the Fennville community.**

**Our Fennville facility purchases over 35 million pounds of fresh cherries, apples and blueberries annually from local Michigan farmers, generating over \$14 million in revenue for local farms. In addition, we spend approximately \$3 million annually in the Fennville community on parts, supplies, services and utilities. Over \$500,000 in state and local tax revenues are paid by our Fennville facility.**

### **Our waste water treatment**

**Our operations use water from the City of Fennville public water supply, principally to wash fruit. Using the system most commonly used by vegetable and fruit processing facilities across Michigan and as permitted by MDEQ, wastewater left over from the washing process and facility operations is regularly tested and then discharged by spray irrigating on four nearby farm fields owned by Birds Eye. This wastewater contains varying amounts of dissolved sugar, nutrients and salts. Results of our monitoring of the groundwater below and around the irrigation sites are regularly reported to MDEQ.**

### **Our work with MDEQ**

**In the Fennville and Allegan County area, bedrock, sand and gravel contain elements such as iron and manganese which find their way into the groundwater because of natural subsurface conditions and man-made activities. After elevated levels of these elements were discovered in groundwater monitoring wells, Birds Eye began working very closely with the MDEQ to investigate the water quality issues. We have installed more than 35 wells and collected more than 500 samples. These samples confirm that iron and manganese are present in wells throughout Fennville, including wells that are not near the Birds Eye facilities. While we continue to investigate, we recognize that there are water quality issues that require a community wide response. Coordinating with MDEQ, Birds Eye has also tested area wells for arsenic. Samples taken from the wells in the irrigation fields used by Birds Eye have contained either no arsenic, or arsenic below applicable MDEQ standards. Samples from a small percentage of area wells tested, including wells that are not adjacent to our spray fields, have found arsenic at levels higher than applicable standards, and Birds Eye continues to work with MDEQ to investigate this issue.**

### **Our commitment to continuous improvement at Fennville**

**While this process moves forward, we have continued to test residents' wells and provide bottled water to certain residents as requested by MDEQ. We have also continued to improve our wastewater management practices and have changed our production volumes, both of which have reduced the amount of wastewater and levels of sugar, nutrients and salts in that water. These levels will be further reduced when enhancements to our water treatment system are completed.**

**We will continue working with our neighbors, government officials and community leaders on the groundwater problem. As members of the Fennville community, our goal is to remain a responsible employer and neighbor, a significant contributor to the area's economy and a proud supporter of community activities that enhance the quality of life for all of its residents.**

**We will share any new information on this situation with our employees and neighbors as soon as it is available. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact Kim Baiers, facility manager, at (269) 561-8211. If Kim can't answer your questions, he will make every effort to track down the information you want or connect you with someone who can.**

**All media inquiries should be directed to Lois Warlick-Jarvie, Senior Vice President Administration, at [lwjarvie@birdseyefoods.com](mailto:lwjarvie@birdseyefoods.com).**



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