



Talking with...

Ben Hall

Director of Technical Services,
Musco Family Olive Co.



Q: Musco recently was named the California 2011 Leader in Innovation in Energy and Agriculture by Grow-California. Tell me a little about what your company did to win that award.

A: Musco Family Olive Co. is the leading branded retail supplier of table olives in America, and we're a leader in environmental sustainability as well. Our 280-acre headquarters in the San Joaquin Valley is home to the cleanest-burning biomass plant in California, and our company is fast approaching its goal of achieving a 100 percent renewable production process.

We won the award for our newest, boldest initiative:

RENEWS™, the Renewable Energy and Wastewater System. RENEWS™ is the only system like it in the world, where two waste streams — in this case, olive pits and wastewater — generate renewable energy and clean water. The system was invented and developed on site by Combined Solar Technologies, whose founder and owner, Frank Schubert, spearheaded the project.

Musco pits more than 8 billion olives every year. Through the RENEWS™ process, 15 tons of olive pits, which are essentially little solar batteries, are ignited every day in a clean-burning biomass furnace. This cutting-edge system generates renewable electricity powered by a steam engine which can be used in the processing facilities.

Additionally, all of our water stays on site in a closed-loop system. We recycle the majority of our water through our proprietary crop and irrigation system, with the remaining water treated by RENEWS™. Our sustainability efforts also include extensive waste diversion from landfills, the farming of NyPa, a patented forage grass that draws salt from the soil, and institutional recycling programs.

Q: When and why did you decide to focus on sustainability initiatives?

A: Sustainability and environmental stewardship have been an important part of the company's mission since it was founded in 1942, and the company has fully integrated sustainability into its corporate culture. The facilities have been updated with energy-efficient lighting, pumps and motors. Through employee awareness training programs and continuous-improvement teams, the efforts are multiplied as employees apply principles

of conservation, energy efficiency, recycling, proper universal waste disposal, recycling and safety to their daily lives at work and at home.

Q: How have the grocery industry and consumers in general responded to the fact Musco is striving to be a leader in environmental stewardship?

A: For about three years, we have been bringing retailers from around the country to visit the production facilities and see firsthand what we do. We bring it to life for them.

We are partnering with grocers in the industry to educate consumers and to tell our story. For example, retailers may tell the Musco story on their websites, with links to our RENEWS™ video, www.olives.com/environment.asp, as an example of the company's own commitment to sourcing sustainable products.

The industry has responded well to our efforts by showing interest and giving us the opportunity to share technology where practical. At the same time, we have been involved with several leading industry workgroups, which has given us the opportunity to learn from others.

We recognize that progress is not going to be the efforts of one individual working alone, but it is going to be the sum efforts of the industry, sharing and collaborating, to work toward a common goal. We hope to inspire other manufacturers to be part of the future.

For consumers and industry, we have a short, compelling video about our environmental initiatives on our website, and we have vibrant Facebook communities for both of our brands, Pearls and Early California, as well as the Musco Family Olive Co. ■

Links and Additional Resources

RENEWS™ video (plus a Discovery Channel segment featuring Musco): www.olives.com/environment.asp
Musco Family Olive Co. website: www.olives.com
Musco Family Olive Co. Facebook pages:
<https://www.facebook.com/EarlyCaliforniaOlives>
<https://www.facebook.com/PearlsOlives>
<https://www.facebook.com/MuscoFamilyOliveCo>

