

Monsanto expands in fruit, veggies

Key Points

- Monsanto's Seminis, in Oxnard, has more than 20% of world veggie seed market.
- Monsanto's new holding company will invest in fruit, veggie seed businesses.
- Holland's Western Seed, France's Poloni Semences are part of holding company.

By **LEN RICHARDSON**

MONSANTO Co., a major player in the world seed and chemical industries, formed the International Seed Group Inc. in 2006. ISG is a holding company that invests in vegetable and fruit seed businesses. Monsanto already owns Seminis, a leading global vegetable germplasm resource and seed company in Oxnard.

At a glance, Seminis has sales in 155 countries, 2006 revenues of \$569 million and over 20% of the global vegetable seed market. The company holds leading positions in nearly every major vegetable crop with 3,000 commercial products, 21 seed-quality labs, 46 distribution centers, and 51 research and development stations in 17 countries. Seminis claims 1.5 million breeding lines and seed production locations in 25 countries.

The cornerstone of ISG's new venture is Holland-based Western Seed. Western



GROWING SEED BUSINESS: Seminis, in Oxnard, is owned by Monsanto Co. and has vegetable sales in 155 countries. Monsanto has invested in two additional large international fruit and vegetable companies: Western Seed and Poloni Semences.

specializes in tomatoes for protected and open-field production and specialty peppers. It also sells melon, watermelon, eggplant and squash. Western's largest markets include western and southern Europe, the Middle East, North Africa,

Argentina, Mexico, and the U.S.

In January, ISG also acquired Poloni Semences, a Charentais melon breeding company based in France. The company's melons are sold in France, Spain, Italy and Morocco.

As ISG operating companies, Western and Poloni will be able to more directly connect their customers to significant innovations in breeding while continuing to operate locally, providing service to their customers and building the value of their brands.

"ISG will complement our Seminis business, providing vegetable growers with greater access to innovations from the brands they already rely on and through the distribution channels that they are familiar with," notes Kerry Preete, who leads Monsanto's vegetable seed division, including Seminis and the new holding company.

In the past year, Seminis refocused its business portfolio to 25 key crops, including tomatoes, peppers and melons — also the primary crops for Western and Poloni. "The ISG platform strengthens our presence in key crops and in areas that are marked for growth," says Preete. "By acquiring Western and Poloni, we improve our position in greenhouse tomato and pepper production and enter the high-value European melon market. Additionally, Western and Poloni's germplasm libraries will be used in tandem with Seminis' leading global vegetable germplasm resources, with the goal of developing products for farmers and consumers."

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