

Local producers buy Calif. sugar refinery

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Two Palm Beach County-based sugar producers have bought a 100-year-old California sugar refinery, giving the local companies a coast-to-coast presence.

American Sugar Refining Inc., owned by Florida Crystals Corp. of West Palm Beach and the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida in Belle Glade, completed the buyout Tuesday of C&H Sugar Co. Inc., said Florida Crystals spokesman Gaston Cantens.

C&H, based in Crockett, near San Francisco, processes more than 700,000 tons of sugar a year from cane grown in Hawaii, Mexico and Pacific Rim countries. Citicorp Venture Capital sold C&H to American Sugar for an undisclosed amount.

C&H was founded in 1906 as the California and Hawaiian Sugar Refining Co.

"It gives us an immediate presence on the West Coast of the U.S.," Cantens said. "It is the only sugar refinery on the West Coast."

A spokeswoman Tuesday at C&H said the company would have no comment.

American Sugar Refining also owns refineries in Yonkers, N.Y.; Baltimore; and Chalmette, La. Buying financially troubled C&H will boost American Sugar Refining's annual capacity to approximately 3 million tons of refined sugar as well as specialty products such as brown sugar, powdered sugar and sugar for professional bakers.

Domino Foods, the sales and marketing arm of American Sugar Refining and Okeelanta Corp., will add C&H to its brands, including Domino, Florida Crystals and Jack Frost.

"This acquisition will help us to continue to compete in the dynamic global marketplace," said Barbara Miedema, spokeswoman for the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative.

Don Carson, executive vice president of Florida Crystals and vice chairman of American Sugar Refining, said the acquisition gives the company a foothold in Mexico's sugar market, both as a refiner and seller.

"Mexico is a very vibrant sugar market. It has a lot of growth and attractive prices," Carson said.

Dalton Yancey, executive vice president of the Florida Sugar Cane League, said Hawaiian growers are pleased the company is being bought by a firm that knows the business.

"It's a very good acquisition on behalf of the American Sugar interests. It gives them a strategic presence," Yancey said.