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Governor touts Graceland Fruit partnership with Japanese firm as promising example

TOKYO – A strategic partnership with Michigan-based Graceland Fruit Inc. and Japan's Otsuka Foods Ltd. shows the potential for growth in the state's agri-food industry, Gov. Rick Snyder said today in joining Otsuka Foods President Yoshihito Nakai, Graceland Fruit CEO Alan DeVore and Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Director Keith Creagh to recognize the alliance.

Frankfort-based Graceland Fruit and Otsuka Foods are developing innovative nutraceutical dried fruit products. Nutraceutical products are those with health and medical benefits.

“Graceland Fruit's partnership with Otsuka Foods is an example of Michigan being ripe for growth and business expansion opportunities within our agri-food sector,” said Snyder. “With a strong public and private investment, coupled with our agricultural diversity, this industry will continue to help fuel Michigan's economic reinvention.”

Graceland's products are sold in the United States and more than 40 other countries with Japan and Germany being two of its largest export markets. Graceland products are consumed as healthy snacks either alone or in trail mixes, as ingredients in salads and restaurant cuisine applications, and as industrial ingredients in a wide variety of uses including baking, cereals, health bars, ice creams and yogurts.

“We are excited to be able to offer innovative products optimizing nutritional and health attributes while delivering convenient products of the highest quality to both the domestic and international markets,” said DeVore. “Through our focus on innovative food science, research, product development and partnership with companies such as Otsuka Foods, we plan to continue to expand our offerings in the dried fruit market.”

“Graceland Fruit has a strong partnership with Otsuka Foods Ltd. which has been a key partner in the research and development of super fruit products, nutraceuticals and functional foods,” said Creagh. “Functional food is food that has new ingredients added, or more of an existing ingredient added, to increase the food’s nutritional content and effect on health promotion or disease prevention allowing for several exciting product development opportunities.”

Graceland Fruit maintains a fully staffed research and development department headed by Dr.

Nirmal Sinha, a world-renowned authority on dried fruit processing techniques. Ken Sekiguchi

of Otsuka Foods has been studying at Michigan State University on a fellowship under the guidance of Sinha, and has been working to use innovative technologies to increase the health benefits of Graceland Fruit’s current dried fruit products. The goal is to produce the current all natural products with reduced sugar or no sugar added, with higher levels of antioxidants and nutraceuticals. These innovative functional food products will meet increasing consumer demand for convenient and delicious snacks that support a healthier life style for families.

Otsuka Foods Co. Ltd. has 800 employees and generates annual revenue of nearly \$800 million. Initially a customer and purchaser of Graceland Fruit products for its Soy Joy nutritional bar, Otsuka Foods has become a strategic partner with Graceland Fruit through a financial investment, leadership with senior officials of Otsuka Foods serving on Graceland Fruit’s board of directors, and an exciting research and development partnership focused on super fruit products, nutraceuticals, and functional food.

Graceland Fruit is a leading producer of dried fruit products. It is the largest manufacturing employer in Benzie County providing 200 jobs in the community. The company primarily produces infused dried fruits such as cherries, cranberries, wild and cultivated blueberries, and apples. It also produces fruit concentrate juice, and a line of frozen fruit products under its

Soft-N-Frozen brand.

Graceland has been a leader in the development of fruit products since 1973. Today, the company uses proprietary technologies to produce shelf-stable infused dried fruit products that

retain their natural nutritional content. The company holds several food science patents and has earned a number of industry awards including the prestigious Edward R. Madigan U.S. Agricultural Export Excellence Award, National Agricultural Marketer of the Year, Michigan Manufacturer of the Year, and Michigan Exporter of the Year. The company maintains an obsessive focus on its responsibility to customers in terms of ensuring food safety, and also in providing affordable products through the use of highly efficient manufacturing practices.

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PHOTO ADVISORY: Gov. Rick Snyder, center, meets with Otsuka Foods Co. officials in Tokyo during his trade mission to Asia. Pictured with Snyder are Shigehiro Kanta, left, managing director of Otsuka Foods, and company President Yoshihito Naki. Otsuka Foods and Michigan-based Graceland Fruit Inc. are engaged in a strategic alliance that shows the potential for growth of the state's agri-food industry.