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Farmer Jack stores go Hollywood

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By JOSEPH SZCZESNY
Of The Oakland Press

Hollywood Markets is in the process of acquiring three stores in Oakland County that are now part of the Farmer Jack chain operated by The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company Inc.

Bill Welch, president of Troy-based Hollywood Markets, said Thursday his chain has agreed to purchase existing Farmer Jack stores in Lake Orion, Rochester Hills and Madison Heights. "We had a longer list but we got the three we wanted," he said.

The acquisition will signal a major expansion for the family-owned Hollywood chain, which currently operates four stores in Troy, Royal Oak, Bloomfield Township and Utica.

Welch said he hopes to close the deal with A&P in the first week of July. The Farmer Jack stores are expected to shut July 7; the stores have been liquidating their current inventory.

The stores being acquired by Hollywood will probably have to close for a short period while they are restocked. The plan, however, is to restock with all fresh produce and groceries as quickly as possible, he said.

More changes are planned at all three of the stores, including changing the stores' meat



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section from self serve to a department with a staff to serve customers, Welch said. "We've got the equipment on order," he said.

Welch also said Hollywood expected to hire between 100 and 150 Farmer Jack employees to staff the stores. "It should be good for them. We're a union store and it'll save their benefits," he said.

Mike Bernacchi, University of Detroit-Mercy marketing expert, said this week he believed with A&P's decision to close and sell off the Farmer Jack chain, the grocery business in the Detroit metropolitan area will have more of local flavor.

Farmer Jack operated more than 60 stores in the Detroit area, including 20 in Oakland County, before A&P's recent decision to withdraw from the market.

Earlier this week, The Kroger Co. announced it will acquire 20 Farmer Jack stores across metro Detroit, including six in Oakland County.

Three of the Farmer Jack stores targeted by Kroger are in Troy, one is in Hazel Park, one is in Bloomfield Township and another is in Novi, Kroger officials said.

Kroger also is in the process of hiring 3,000 new employees both to increase the staffing at the 77 stores it now operates around Detroit and the 20 stores it is purchasing from A&P.

Farmer Jack customers are similar in many respects to Kroger customers in that they prefer traditional grocery stores to large supercenters, said Kroger spokesman Dale Hollandsworth.

Meijer is also offering special discounts to consumers who traditionally have preferred to shop at Farmer Jack.

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