BAKERSFIELD, Calif., Dec. 24—The Di Giorgio Corporation, in a recent announcement, disclosed its intention to abandon a once-flourishing agriculture empire in California's land-rich southern San Joaquin Valley.

J. Max O'Neill, president of the Di Giorgio Fruit Corporation, a division of the Di Giorgio Corporation, announced in San Francisco that Di Giorgio had begun negotiations for the sale of 6,117 acres, the remaining unsold portion of Di Giorgio Farms.

The acreage includes the community of Di Giorgio, once the heart of a verdant, 18-square-mile expanse of farmland on which were grown table grapes, plums, cotton, potatoes, asparagus, wheat and peanuts. This was the largest parcel of the company's nationwide acreage.

To hundreds of families who have lived and worked in Di Giorgio since 1920, the announcement meant the death of a community, the dissolution of a family.

The farm in its peak years of the nineteen-fifties had a year-round population of some 800. Di Giorgio still has its own post office, fire department, medical center and school district. The permanent population has dwindled today to 62 hourly and 53 salaried employees, according to Mr. O'Neill.

The remaining employees persist in loyalty to the company, despite their days of

Continued on Page 52, Column 1
Continued From Page 51

employment with Di Giorgio being numbered. They say nothing of the current negoti-
tations of the past. They also pledge silence.

J. A. Di Giorgio, corporation vice president in charge of the farm, refers all in-
quiries to the San Francisco headquarters.

The history of this agriculture empire had its begin-
nings on a lemon farm in Sicily. There, Giuseppe "Joe" Di Giorgio was born in 1874.

At the age of 14, Peppino, as he was called by his par-
ents, left the seminary where he was enrolled and came to America. His first job was with a fruit jobber in New York City at a salary of $8 a week.

After a few years he moved to Baltimore, where he went into the jobbing business himself. He managed to get a $5,000 loan from the First National Bank, for which institution he was to become a director at 21.

In 1904, Mr. Di Giorgio founded the Baltimore Fruit Exchange. He went into the shipping and commission busi-
ness and transacted his first deal with a purchase in 1911 of the Earl Fruit Com-
pany, a long-established California shipper. Through Earl, he was to acquire a thorough knowledge of California grow-
ing.

Land Purchased

In 1919 he started a land-
buying venture in California, acquiring extensive acreage in the San Joaquin Valley. That same year, Di Giorgio purchased about 3,000
acres near Arvin, the future site of the community of Di Gio-

rgio. At its peak operation in 1959, Di Giorgio Farms spanned 10,581 acres. Of this, 5,553 acres were planted in market and wine variety grapes, 1,043 acres in plums, 168 acres of asparagus and 1,369 acres planted to plant-
tatoes, peaches, cotton and grain.

So, 900 miles of concrete pipe were used to distribute 60,000,000 gallons of water annually to irrigate the property.

Most of the older employees at Di Giorgio arrived from Texas and Oklahoma, driven out by the Dust Bowl siege that ravaged those states dur-
ing the depression.

As the farm grew and prosper-
er, Di Giorgio provided dwellings for its permanent employees.

Robert Di Giorgio has been vice president since 1949 and financial vice president since 1955. J. A. Di Giorgio was elected a vice president in 1946 and placed in charge of the farm.

Beginning of the End

The beginning of the end for Di Giorgio Farm started when the United States Bu-
reau of Reclamation enforced its ceiling limits on the Di Giorgio holdings in the southern San Joaquin Valley. Di Giorgio had been under contract for water from the Federal Government, and now, as the Central Valley Project is completed, the Federal Government limited the number of growers who could tap the project's water, and Di Giorgio consented to a lower price. During the first 10 years of the contract, Di Giorgio has the right to sell the acreage at prices not in excess of the appraised value. Di Giorgio sold about 920 acres in 1967 for a total of $1,667,625. Remaining acreage is now being negotiated for sale.

Another factor that has hastened the end of Di Giorgio Farm was the farm labor movement of Cesar Chavez. In 1966, after the union boy-
cott of Di Giorgio grapes and allied products, the corpora-
tion recognized the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee and negotiated a contract.

The following year, Di Giorgio eliminated its table grape table grape production entirely to wine grapes, an operation that requires signifi-
cantly fewer field workers.

An additional factor in the elimination of Di Giorgio Farm is the corporation's ex-

pansion into other fields. From modest beginnings in agriculture, Di Giorgio Cor-

poration has become a broad-based producer, distri-
buting and marketing foods and other consumer goods, distribution and manufacture of drugs and cosmetics, timber products for the construction and wood pulp industries, land development for shopping centers, condomini-

um apartments, recreational areas and mobile home parks and production and market-
ing of various products in the United States and Western Europe.

"Less than 2 percent of our total revenue in 1967 came from agriculture," Mr. O'Neill observed.