



LEGACY AND LEADERSHIP

“We’re getting a lot of success in offering complete power units as the industry continues to move to Final Tier 4 compliance,” says Don Camp Jr., president and general manager of Western Power Products.

Rooted in California cotton, the Camp family grows businesses devoted to agriculture and engines

Wofford B. “Bill” Camp earned his first dollar picking 100 pounds of cotton on his father’s South Carolina farm at age 9. Little did he know that the fiber crop would eventually lead him and future generations of his family to running one of the West’s most successful engine distributorships.

But how do you go from hand-picking cotton to supplying OEMs with engines that make their machines some of the industry’s best? It all started when Camp left school after the eighth grade and eventually enrolled at Clemson College where he earned his agronomy degree during World War I. To support the war effort, Bill took a job with the USDA where he was charged with developing a reliable source of long staple cotton in California, which the Air Corps used to cover the wings of the newly emerging flying machines. By the time World War I ended, cotton had become a promising agricultural crop in California, and Camp became known as the “Father of California Cotton.”

In 1936 Camp started his own farming operation in California, which prospered and expanded to include farms in South Carolina and Washington. In 1969, California began channeling water from the northern part

of the state to the San Joaquin Valley. The immediate need for a variety of farming equipment convinced Bill’s son, Don Camp Sr., to open several John Deere farm dealerships in the fertile valley.

Power for specialty farm equipment

The next logical step for the Camp family was to open an engine distributorship 10 years later where they would sell John Deere engines to a wide variety of OEMs in the Western states. “With over 200 fruit and vegetable crops in California alone, the need for good reliable engines that go in dozens of different applications was extremely high,” says Don Camp Jr., Bill’s grandson who manages Western Power Products in Bakersfield, California. “My father was really quite perceptive to see the need for selling quality engines to the growing number of new OEMs that were setting up shop in California. We live right in the middle of America’s salad bowl where there are many, many unique applications for engines in agriculture — along with many construction, marine, and other commercial uses. We customize power packages for many of these needs.”



The Camp family celebrated the 80th anniversary of DM Camp & Sons, a third-generation business headquartered in Kern County. Don Camp Sr., son of Wofford B. Camp, sits before his three sons (from left) Edwin Camp, president of DM Camp & Sons; Don Camp, Jr., president of Western Power Systems; and Clayton Camp, president of Kern Machinery, Inc., a John Deere dealership with four California locations.

Western Power Products sells John Deere engines alone or in complete packages, often with Funk hydraulic products, including pump drives, axles, and transmissions. The engine distributor sells John Deere engines to customers in California, Arizona, Nevada, Hawaii, and more recently, Utah. Applications range from engine-powered orchard equipment and irrigation pumping units to propulsion engines for the marine industry.

“Even the cotton industry that my dad and grandfather helped to establish in California, in some respects, is being nurtured along by irrigation pumping units we now supply,” Camp notes. “My dad, who is now 92, saw that irrigation was always going to be key in the West. He wanted to be in on the irrigation

by supplying farmers with engine pumps for deep wells or for pumping surface water to fields through aluminum pipe. He was a good champion of taking care of customers, recognizing needs, and treating others well. You will grow as an organization if you do that, and that's what we are all about."

Experts at their craft

Camp says Western Power Products wants to be recognized as the best value complete engine power unit supplier in the Western United States — which is the company's mission statement.

"We don't want to supply someone with just a bare engine and make it a commodity that anyone can sell off the shelf," Camp explains. "We're trying to add value to our engines for our OEMs by running them through our shop to add labor and components to make the engine package a complete unit for any kind of off-highway application. By adding our engineering capabilities, we can make sure the engine is well-suited for the application, has the proper cooling system, and can last the life of the application it is designed for. Then we back the engine up with good product support through us and our dealers."

Camp says their OEM customers have been very open-minded to using their expertise as they transition to Final Tier 4 engines. "They are having to redo a number of machines and change things around," he says. "We're getting a lot of success in offering complete power units as the industry continues to move to Final Tier 4 compliance."

Western Power Products also offers expertise in emissions regulations. Bob Morrelli is the company's emissions compliance advisor and works closely with California's 35 air districts as well as the California Air Resources Board, the overarching agency that oversees diesel engine emissions regulations in the state. He makes sure what he tells OEMs and dealers about emissions is absolutely correct by staying in touch with his EPA contacts and other experts in the industry.

"We have the capability and expertise to develop Final Tier 4 prototype machines in house, which



Wofford Camp (right) inspects potatoes with his son, Don. Wofford Camp was recognized by the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans. The association annually awards outstanding Americans who exemplify dedication, purpose, and perseverance in their personal and professional lives.

is a big help," says Camp. "We know we can give good direction when needed to our customer base. It does make a difference."

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The four engineers at Western Power Products provide 2D and 3D designs using the latest SolidWorks engineering software, which is the same software used by most OEM customers. "We send electronic files back and forth to our customers and visit their operations regularly with engineering staff," he says. "We also have technical communicators who do application reviews and testing. All this is to stay close to the needs of our customers.

"This has been tricky for a lot of our applications on the OEM side," Camp adds. "A lot of our engines power a variety of harvesting equipment that our OEMs sell worldwide, such as sprayers, tree shakers, elevators to load harvested crops into trailers, and nut harvesters. The equipment needs an engine that will work in a variety of weather conditions, whether it's hazelnuts in Oregon, pecans in Texas and Georgia, or almonds in South America, Australia, and South Africa. It makes a difference having a great engineering staff like we do."

Today Don Camp Sr.'s children operate the family businesses. Edwin runs farms, Clayton runs the John Deere agricultural dealerships, and Don Camp Jr. manages the engine distributorship. The Camp brothers agree that



A technician tests a Final Tier 4/Stage IV engine at Western Power Products in Bakersfield, California.

they don't have to sell the least expensive engine or tractor to gain customers. "When you buy John Deere, you are buying quality, and you are buying a good network of dealers and support from distributors. With that, you get the training, service, and everything that goes with it. We may charge a higher price than some competitors, but we believe there is good value there," Camp says.

Today, the Camp family operates four John Deere dealerships in California, two in Oregon, and one in Idaho. The engine distributorship recently expanded to a third location in Utah. The family sold their farms in South Carolina and Washington to expand into almonds, oranges, wine grapes, table grapes, carrots, and fingerling potatoes in California.

"We try to live by my dad's motto: Things continue to change, and you need to keep your eyes and ears open so you can change with the times," Camp says. "You can't expect life to stay the same, so offer what the market needs and what makes sense. The equipment market has always been in constant change. It's important to look at what you're doing then tweak it, drop something, or add something else. And keep improving what you do for customer support. That will keep you in business for the long term."

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