

## SOUTHERNAG PROFITS BY WORKING FOR PEANUTS

For Henry Griffin, working for peanuts is fine. In fact, hauling that crop has helped SouthernAG Carriers grow 15 percent over the past three years — an enviable record during a recession.

Griffin, who owns the Athens, Ga.-based SouthernAG, said dedicated personnel and key decisions made before the downturn led to that success. Those include his decision in 2008 to diversify operations by adding a long-haul division and a fleet of 60 refrigerated trailers. The fleet also benefits from an adherence to food-safety regulations that borders on obsession.

“We’ve been dedicated to the peanut industry primarily and have taken those procedures and moved them on to other areas,” he said. “Back in 2008 when the economy started getting bad we made a decision to go into the refrigerated industry. We thought food was one of the areas that would stay pretty strong.”

“We have so many different applications,” said SouthernAG company president Hugh Nall. “We have some great customers that help us to be successful.”

The operation fields 225 company trucks and 125 owner-operator rigs. Together they haul 100,000 loads of agricultural and finished products a year.

But it is Griffin’s insistence on meeting the most stringent food-safety guidelines that feeds growth. SouthernAG was the first common carrier in the United States to be certified under the Safe Quality Food program. SQF asks suppliers to provide verifiable proof that robust food safety control systems have been effectively implemented.

Before that, Griffin insisted the company undergo Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Points training. HACCP is a management system that addresses food safety through the analysis and control of biological, chemical and physical hazards.

And before that, Griffin made sure the company received ISO 9001 certification.

There is a documented procedure in place for everything — every process, every piece of equipment. “Food safety,” he said, “is a top priority.”

So is dependable equipment, which is why SouthernAG just bought 33 Mack® Pinnacle™ models with another 25 on order from Larry Taylor at Transpower in Albany, Ga. The trucks feature 445-HP MP8 engines, 12,000-pound-capacity front and 40,000-pound-capacity rear axles, with 70-inch midrise sleepers.

“The big thing you want out of a truck is dependability and durability,” Nall said. “If it’s not running it’s not producing revenue. Macks have done well for us. They’re revenue-producing vehicles.”

Fuel economy is just as critical, said Griffin, a partner in the EPA’s SmartWay® program. “I’ve gotten compliments from all of our drivers on the comfort of the ride and the visibility from the cab. But the main thing is the Macks have the power that is required when you’re pulling 80,000-pound gross loads. We’re also getting great fuel efficiency. We have several long-haul trucks that are averaging over 8 mpg and the fleet is averaging more than 7 mpg. When you’ve got a truck that performs with power and fuel economy, that’s a good mix. Mack has done a good job for us.”

