

GROWERTALKS

Acres & Acres

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Of Plants and Pizza

Chris Beytes



CHRIS BEYTES

We're fortunate, you and I, that we get to earn our living selling a product that everybody loves. And when I say everybody, I hope I mean everybody. Is there a human on the planet who can honestly say they don't like flowers and plants? If so, that's one bitter person. Sure, you may not like a particular species—personally, when it comes to poison ivy, I'd rather not—but as a whole, I think we've backed a winner.

Flowers and plants are not commodities—basic goods or materials, like iron or crude oil or cotton, with little to distinguish one from another.

Ours is not a staple or necessity item like bread or eggs or lettuce that you buy every week, often seeking the lowest price or most convenience.

We don't sell a true luxury product, meaning something afforded by only a few and deemed highly desirable by the rest of us. Yes, you can spend hundreds or thousands on specimen plants, but much of our product is "cheap and cheerful." Walk into a garden center with \$5 and you can walk out with a plant.

And best of all, our products (at least those not fresh-cut) get bigger and better over time, giving the purchaser more plant than they started with and gifting the planet life-giving oxygen in exchange for absorbing harmful carbon dioxide. Grow flowers and they nurture the soul. Grow veggies and fruits and they nourish the body. Grow trees and shrubs and they cool and clean your surroundings. Talk about a win-win-win!

I challenge you to name another product that can compete with that. I've thought on this one a long time to no avail. The closest I've gotten (and it's more of a comedy stretch than anything) is beer and pizza, which, in reality, only gives your tastebuds and brain a temporary buzz. You still have to clean up the cans and boxes in the morning—and you can't recycle a used pizza box.

Chickens grow from cute, tiny chicks to egg-laying hens. But those who keep them joke that each egg costs about \$100 by the time you add up all the inputs.

Pets? Well, maybe. Which is why Americans spent \$136.8 billion on them in 2022. But they bring value to their owners, mostly, not society as a whole (which has to spend millions on shelters and dog poop signs and the like).

Our product is unapologetically good for people and the planet. Many other consumer products should come with written apologies as standard. Not that you'd get one. You never hear, for instance, the makers or sellers of anything containing a battery apologize for the African cobalt mine required to make that battery. Sure, we have plastic pots,

but that's a far cry from subsistence child labor, if not outright slavery. Plus, there are plenty of biodegradable options and plastic recycling opportunities for growers who are seriously worried about the optics of plastic pots.

Customers make special trips to buy our products. They excitedly plan a day out with their family or mom or best friend. They put on their fun gardening outfit. I remember touring the posh garden center Terrain in Pennsylvania with the manager. I commented on a mud puddle and what that would do to ladies' shoes.

"Oh, no," he replied. "They break out their best Terrain togs when they come here, including boots."

When was the last time you got excited about going shopping for something? Well, okay, Cabela's. Or Guitar Center. But those products don't come with the benefits listed above. And while that sort of shopping is fun, many people shop our garden centers for the calming escape they provide. Why do you think so many English and European garden centers have cafes? Because they learned long ago how wonderful it is to relax with a snack or beverage among the flowers and plants. I've never seen a café at a car dealer (although to its credit, car floor mat mega-manufacturer WeatherTech does have a complimentary coffee shop in their Illinois headquarters).

Yes, we've got it good. All we have to do is grow a pretty, healthy plant and display it attractively at retail, and keep it watered and happy, and chances are very good it will go on to live out its life bringing joy.

Unlike my cat. Which is under the bed, ignoring me.

Maybe I'll order a pizza ... **GT**