

GROWERTALKS

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Chris Beytes

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For those who worry that poinsettias have been reduced to the level of corn and soybeans, take heart: *Better Homes and Gardens* thinks enough of them to put them on the cover of the December issue—a Strawberries 'N Cream held by a cute little girl, to be exact. And inside, they mention Monet, Peterstar Marble and others. Grab a copy so you can be prepared when your customers come looking for "that poinsettia I saw on the cover of *Better Homes*".

My first mass market poinsettia sighting was a positive one: Home Depot had 6 1/2-in. reds and whites in pot covers for \$4.99—and they looked good. I believe they were from Masterpiece (Henry Mast). It proves that growers can and will produce good plants when they're not forced, out of economics, to grow them on 11-in. centers.

And just the other morning, the local TV traffic reporter was broadcasting from the Chicago Botanic Garden, amidst a sea of poinsettias. They were touting pinks and Jingle Bells as exciting new colors.

So remember: You may be jaded, but the consumer isn't.

Poinsettia trial dates

When it comes to poinsettia magazine coverage, I'll be covering the poinsettia trials at Purdue University and Heartland Growers on November 30. *GrowerTalks'* Editor-at-Large, Jennifer White, will be at Pleasant View Gardens in New Hampshire, December 1, for their open house. And I'll have reporters on the scene for the open houses at NCSU (December 2) and University of Florida (December 7). Go to www.poinsettia-trial.org for details on the Purdue, NCSU and UF trials. And if you have comments or reviews of trials in your area that you think should make it into this commentary or *GrowerTalks*, let me know.

What the Sears/Kmart deal means

So Kmart is now owned by Sears. Good news, at least temporarily, for anyone who's selling to Kmart. Maybe it's a bit more assurance that your invoices will be paid. And maybe we can go back to saying there are four major players in mass market floriculture. But I say temporarily because, while Kmart has been profitable for the last four quarters, and its stock is selling for more than \$100 per share, the retailer is still looking for its niche between Wal-Mart and Target. You'd be wise to keep a close eye on the financial pages if you're selling to them.

Dummen USA and Plantpeddler reorganize

Just before leaving for China and the Netherlands, I heard that there'd been some sort of change in the relationship between breeding company Dummen and Plantpeddler, the Cresco, Iowa-business that was the headquarters and business partner for Dummen USA. Part of the rumor I'd heard was that Dummen was partnering with Express Seed in Oberlin, Ohio, for some sort of exclusive distribution arrangement.

During Horti Fair in Amsterdam, I had the chance to talk with both Perry Wismans of Dummen and Mike Gooder of Plantpeddler. To make two long stories short, the two companies have parted ways (at least from a company management perspective) due to what both call "philosophical differences." However, Dummen does not have an exclusive deal with Express or any other broker. Dummen is opening an office in Ohio-in Hilliard, near Columbus (chosen for its OFA Short Course proximity, Perry says). And it has hired two staffers, Diane Surette, a Ball Seed veteran; and Jon Pierre, formerly of both Express Seed and Green Circle Growers and son of former Express Seed partner Ron Pierre (all of which likely contributed to the rumors of an Express partnership). Perry says that Dummen will continue working with all of its brokers.

On the Plantpeddler side, Mike Gooder says his company will continue to be the exclusive rooting station for Dummen USA for 2005 and will work with the new management to ensure order fulfillment. The focus for the future is the continued development of business in young plants, especially begonia liners, as well as pre-finished and finished products. Plantpeddler has just broken ground on an additional 100,000 sq. ft. of greenhouse space.

Floral Plant Growers gets new owner

One of the original players in the greenhouse consolidation game, Floral Plant Growers (FPG), based in Wisconsin and Maryland, has a new owner-or has been "recapitalized," as the financial types like to put it.

It's all good news, however, says Dean Chaloupka, FPG's president. The original investor, Sentinel Capital Partners, made money on the investment. (Sentinel formed the FPG group when it bought out Art and Ken Van Wingerden, FPG's previous owners, then bought Natural Beauty of Wisconsin, formerly owned by Gene and Arlis Greiling.) Dean says Sentinel Capital had held on to its investment as long as it usually does in these types of deals and decided to sell to give some return to its investors. The new owner is Blue Point Capital Partners of Seattle; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Cleveland.

Dean and the other FPG leadership will remain in place. In fact, Dean is buying into the business, so now he's not just president, he's one of the owners.

Costs going up, up, up?

Not a survey, per se, but I'm curious: What are you seeing in the way of price increases on your inputs and services, especially due to increased oil prices? Have you seen some big transportation surcharges from any of your suppliers? How about plastic costs? Are your flats and pots going up? How much? If you've got stories-horror or otherwise-let me know.

See you next time,

Chris

Editor

