

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Conard-Pyle Refocuses, Enforces Patent

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Steve Hutton, CEO of Conard-Pyle in West Grove, Pennsylvania, announced he'll be downsizing his family business out of finished material to focus instead on breeding, licensing, young plants and bareroot roses. Not because they are being forced to, Steve said, but because a down cycle is the perfect time to reinvent your business.

"The nursery business is in a mess," the third-generation nurseryman stated frankly in a phone interview with GrowerTalks. "There's too much of everything. There are too many plants, there are too many nurseries, too much breeding—even in my part of the business. Too many wholesalers. Even, in some cases, too many retailers. There's too much of everything except consumers." The other "mess" we face, he says, is the macro-economic mess—the recession—which is a global issue.

"I'm firmly convinced that when we nursery folks get on the other side of these two messes, it's going to be a different landscape entirely," he continued. "You had better be very, very good at at least one thing—and probably only one thing. So we had to pick, and we're going to use the time that these two messes have given us to transition from what we've been for the last 25 or 30 years into what we're going to become."

To that end, Conard-Pyle is selling their 230-acre Maryland finished plant facility and leasing their Pennsylvania finished plant facility in order to focus on breeding and young plant production. An added benefit of getting out of the finished plant business is that they'll no longer be competing with their liner and young plant customers—"I don't think that's a very sustainable practice," Steve says.

Steve says the move is not being necessitated by any sort of financial problems inside the company. "This is a proactive move," he says. "We don't have the hot breath of our bankers on our neck saying, 'Do this or die.' ... This is something that we wanted to choose for ourselves from a position of relative strength."

Steve added that in the company's 113-year history, they've reinvented themselves several times. The company will still be known as The Conard-Pyle Company and will be headquartered at the present West Grove, Pennsylvania, location.

In other Conard-Pyle news, the company has recently reached a settlement with a central Florida nursery and landscaper found to have infringed its plant patent and trademark rights on its Knock Out Roses program.

In addition to imposing a financial penalty, Conard-Pyle required the offender to destroy a large number of infringing plants. The nursery and landscaper was in violation of United States Plant Patent Laws that state no one may asexually propagate or sell any patented plant without the permission of the patent owner. To ensure the rights of their popular Knock Out brand of roses are being protected, Conard-Pyle is taking legal steps to enforce its trademark and plant patent rights throughout the horticultural industry.

“Illegal propagation is a topic that we take very seriously,” says Jacques Ferare, vice president of license for The Conard-Pyle Co. “As the introducer of Knock Out Roses, we are committed to ensuring that Knock Out plants are grown and marketed only by legitimate growers. This not only protects these legitimate nurseries, it also guarantees that the consumer is getting the real thing and not a ‘knock off.’” **GT**