Ball Horticultural Company (GrowerTalks' parent company) has broken ground on a new Premier Seed Lab, which will replace the aging facilities they've been using for decades.

The new building, located at Ball's headquarters in West Chicago, Illinois, will feature 36,000 sq. ft. of lab and operational space, and another 9,000 sq. ft. of warehouse space, says Steve Cull, Ball's director of seed operations. The company hopes to complete the first phase of the project by Christmas. All of Ball's seed technology and research—pelleting, priming, coating, the Ball Controlled Growth products and Ball Vigor Index testing—will be housed in the new facility.

The current seed lab dates back to at least the 1930s. You can still find the old cooler where Ball held flowers for rail shipment. An old railroad siding that used to run between two buildings was eventually built over as they expanded the space. It's long been due for replacement.

"Seed technology is an area that Ball has been extraordinarily successful with over the years, and we continue to grow both in terms of our market share and the breadth of our product offering, so we've just outgrown those facilities," says Steve. "Plus, they're just old and dilapidated, so we're trying to upgrade the facility, make it a little bit more cost-effective to maintain, and have the capacity to accommodate new product lines and new technologies that are coming down the line."

Another aspect of the facility is that it will be LEED certified. All of the construction techniques and materials used to build the Premier Seed Lab are environmentally responsible, says Steve. This also means the new lab will be more energy efficient, with areas to support more natural light and fresh air, along with sustainable landscaping surrounding the outside. GT