

Scotts Buys Into Bonnie Plant Farm

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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

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- Scotts' view of the deal
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- Free landscape plant webinar
- Cool products video from TPIE
- More items from IPM
- Sweet potatoes
- Three from EasyCare Plants
- Compressed air as PGR?
- New logo for Selecta



Scotts buys into Bonnie Plants

I told you back in December that **Scotts Miracle-Gro** had hinted that they were on the verge of partnering with an "industry leading brand" with a "significant presence" in the current retail channel.

Now we know who it is: It's **Bonnie Plant Farm**, the giant vegetable bedding plant grower based in Union Springs, Alabama.

I'm not surprised. I suspected it would be an edibles company rather than an annuals or woody ornamentals brand. It just makes better strategic sense for Scotts. Bonnie has 72 growing stations in 48 states, and is in every single Walmart, Home Depot and Lowe's store in the U.S. And 4,800 independent garden centers, too. No other plant brand has that much market coverage or retail exposure.

According to the press release, Scotts will have minority ownership in Bonnie, which is owned by Alabama Farmers Cooperative (AFC).

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My main question, as usual, is “Why?”

I asked that, via email, of Stan Cope, president and grandson of the founders. Actually, what I asked was, “Why does Bonnie Plants want or need a partnership with Scotts? Your business seems pretty good without that.”

Here’s his reply to that question and others:

Stan Cope: “Our business is great! As Jim Hagedorn [CEO and Chairman of Scotts] said in our press release, the relationship between Bonnie and Scotts ‘dates back decades.’ We have a long-standing history of friendship, camaraderie, respect and, in 1996, we formally partnered on a co-branding marketing program with Scotts for Miracle-Gro, which was quite successful. That said, we’ve jointly discussed and explored ways to work together to build the gardening category for many, many years. Now is finally the time to join forces, work together and drive the gardening category to new heights.”

Chris Beytes: AFC sounds like a pretty big organization – is a deal this big something unusual for them? Or are there other such partnerships/deals among other AFC-owned companies?

SC: “This is definitely a big deal for AFC. The opportunity to partner with the world’s largest consumer gardening company fits perfectly with AFC’s vision of strategic partnerships where appropriate. This is not a new concept for AFC. In 2004, they put their agronomy business into a joint venture whose partner is now WinField Solutions, a wholly owned subsidiary of Land O’ Lakes. AFC is always looking for strategic partnerships where they make sense.”


CB: Scotts brings marketing prowess to the table. Will we see the Bonnie Plant name on the side of a NASCAR race car? In other words, what sort of marketing might we see? Will you try to make Bonnie Plants a household name?

SC: “As Scotts is a well-known marketing expert, we’re quite confident their marketing prowess will be both impressive as well as extremely beneficial to Bonnie. Currently, in the near term, Scotts’ marketing expertise will enhance and improve consumers’ livegoods shopping experience through better product naming, packaging, merchandising and even garden-to-table initiatives.”

CB: Something else they bring to the table is R&D. What sort of R&D does Bonnie need from Scotts?

SC: “We welcome Scotts extensive and proven successful R&D expertise, which will help innovate with the goal to offer vegetable and herb plants with quicker and more plentiful harvests. We are also exploring new innovation products to help drive growth in the category.”

Got an opinion to share? Or want to read what other folks have to say? [Click HERE.](#)



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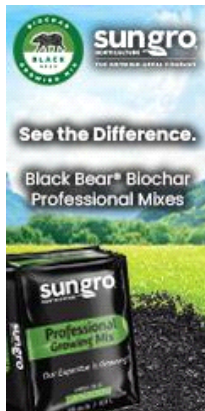
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Scotts' side of the story

For Scotts Miracle-Gro’s view of the deal, I called Mike Sutterer, VP of Marketing, and hit him with the “why” question.

“We have all the products that go around the plant—soil, plant food, mulch and other products,” he replied. “But we aspire to be more than just a garden products company. We need to be a gardening company. And gardening always starts with the plant.”

Mike calls Bonnie Plants, “The best in the industry at what they do.”



Scotts has “dabbled” in livegoods over the last decade or so, Mike says, “but we’ve never really figured it out.” So instead, they decided to partner with a livegoods company that compliments their strengths: building brands, marketing, understanding the consumer, R&D and finding new benefits for the category.

“Those are things we do very well.”

As I said to Stan Cope, Bonnie Plants has been quite successful without outside help. What does Mike see Scotts doing to improve upon Bonnie’s business model?

“Number one is do no harm,” he said with a laugh. “You don’t stay around as a brand or a company for 100 years by accident. Clearly, you’re doing something right.”

“[But] For all the success that they’ve had, there are a lot of things they could do better,” he adds, such as taking advantage of evolving consumer trends like organics and ready-to-use vegetables and herbs.

“I think that’s where we can help from an R&D and marketing standpoint, and build upon the success that Bonnie has achieved over the past 100 years.”

Who (or what) is the Alabama Farmers Cooperative?

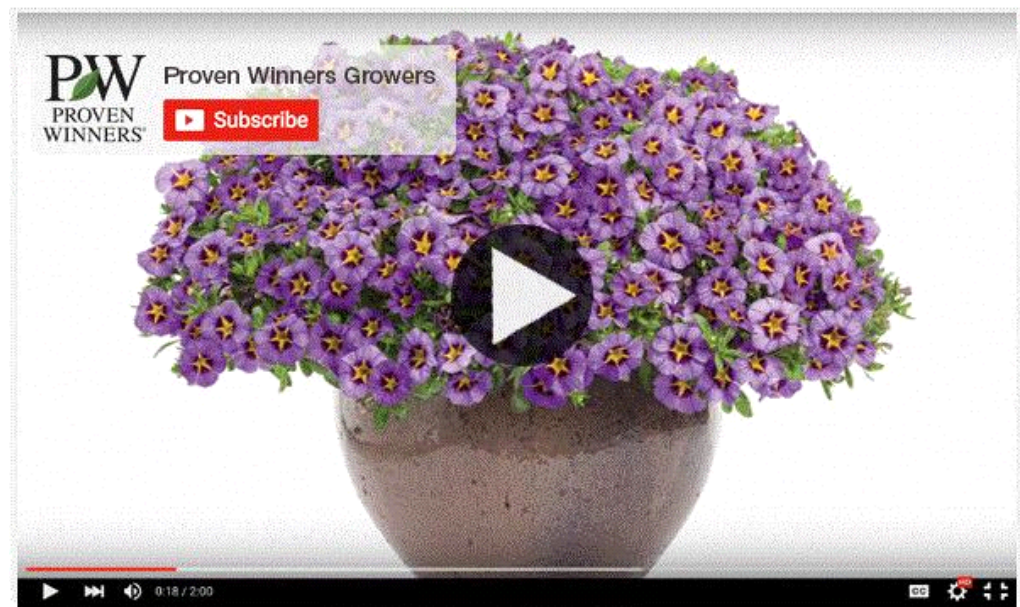
I’ve long known that Bonnie Plants is owned by a farmers’ cooperative. But I never knew just how big and expansive that cooperative is until I Googled it.

AFC was founded in 1936 as a way for Alabama farmers to buy fertilizer at a fair price. Over the years they added animal feed, general farm supplies like tires and tools, a grain marketing service, and even their own retail stores, Quality Cooperative (of which there are nearly 80).

Bonnie Plants came onboard AFC in 1975. They were joined by a catfish producer called SouthFresh Farms in 1999, and Biologic, a developer of crop protectants, seed, feed and fertilizer for wildlife management.

It truly is farmer owned and managed. AFC’s Board is made up of farmers from Alabama and northwest Florida, and each member co-op shares in the financial proceeds from AFC’s operations.

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If you're a landscaper or you grow plants for landscapers, you don't want to miss Ball Publishing's next great webinar: “Plants with Personality for Landscapers.”

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In this webinar, you'll learn what various clients—the “tried-and-truer,” the “low-maintenance requirer,” the “water-wise worrier” and the “weird-and-wackys” want in plants for their installations.

Our speaker? Melissa Scherb, seasonal landscape professional and account manager for Woodlawn Landscape Company of Mundelein, Illinois; and Jeff Gibson, Landscape Manager for Ball Horticultural Company, West Chicago, Illinois.

If you're a landscape professional, your job is to turn your client's vision into reality. If you're a grower, your job is to do it within your landscaper's client's budget and timeframe. This webinar answers both needs.

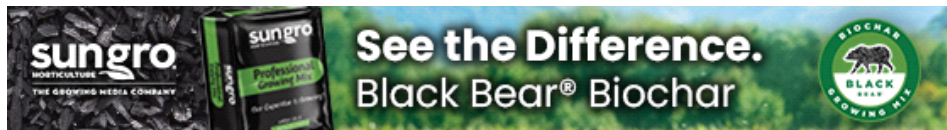
And remember, it's free!

Cool Product video from TPIE

What do Geoballs, Biodomes and dart frogs have in common? They're all Cool Product Award winners from the Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition I attended a couple weeks ago in Ft. Lauderdale. Selected by a team of retail and interiorscape experts led by Danny Summers of the Garden Center Group, the Cool Products are an interesting slice of the trade show's offerings of plants and hardgoods—including some stuff I might have missed had they not called them out.



I put them all into a video that you can watch [HERE](#).



Four more from IPM

Of the 400 items from IPM Essen I could write about, here are four:

BrazelBerry wins woody prize. America had a good showing at IPM! Costa Farms won the AIPH International Grower of the Year, and BrazelBerry, developed by Fall Creek Farm & Nursery, was named a New Plant Innovation Showcase winner in the Woody Plants category, thanks to the German nursery Jeddelloh Pflanzenhandels, which is distributing their decorative and delicious line of berry plants in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. A top-quality producer and marketer, Jeddelloh is also a licensee of Endless Summer hydrangeas.



Nils Neumann (marketing and PR), Jan Jeddelloh Sr., Jan Jeddelloh Jr. and David Schlosberg (Fall Creek).

I asked third-generation owner Jan Jeddelloh Jr. why the family decided to pick up Fall Creek's BrazelBerry line.

"We saw that it's been going well in the U.S. It's a seller," he said matter-of-factly. He added that it's perfect for the home-grown and healthy food trend prevalent in Europe right now. Coincidentally, Jan knows the U.S. market; he interned at Monrovia for a year.

David Schlosberg, Fall Creek's Director of Sales, said, "it's really cool" that Jeddelloh won this prize the first time showing BrazelBerry. He added that, along with quality production, Jeddelloh's strength is in marketing.

"They've done a phenomenal job taking [BrazelBerry] to a new level."



(Sweet) taties from Ireland

My friend Pat FitzGerald, proprietor of FitzGerald's Nursery of County Kilkenny, Ireland, had a stand brimming with his usual offerings of interesting perennials, grasses and such. But his latest project is food: namely, sweet potatoes. Developed by America's Louisiana State University, of all places.



Pat told me the sweet potato project began as a hobby in 2007, but it has gotten pretty big with professional growers, at least in southern Europe, and hobby gardeners everywhere, in large part because of the health benefits of the orange tuber. Pat says it's a bit too cold to grow them on a large scale in Ireland, but you can grow a specialty crop of small spuds for the gourmet and fine restaurant market. He's got six varieties.

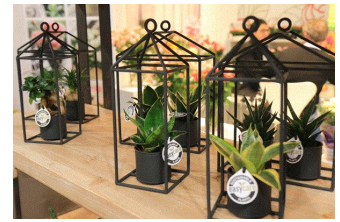
Pat is also offering another exotic underground crop: Oca (that's them in the foreground), which he says grows like a baby potato and has a very low glycemic index.

Got an opinion to share? Or want to read what other folks have to say? [Click HERE.](#)



Easy Care's trendy packaging

Last year, Danish nursery Feldborg Tropical Plants and its Easy Care brand wowed the crowds with Charmon—sanseveria with jewelry. I stopped by looking for an encore and got three: “Stone,” “Color Drops” and “Greenhouse.”



Another cool one? “Knitwear”—a knitted “sweater” with handles wrapping the plant’s pot. There’s talk of a line of matching scarfs. I mean, a plant’s gotta look good.



A blast of air for height control

Downstairs in Hall 1a is called Green City, and it’s primarily floral design. But from previous experience, I knew that you sometimes could find some interesting university research being highlighted. Which explains the young guy standing next to a small Dutch container bench with a little irrigation boom moving across a sampling of plants.

Achim Wegscheider is a doctoral student at the University of Hohenheim in Germany, working on crop physiology of specialty crops, and his research project is testing the use of compressed air as a plant growth regulator. His boom irrigator carries air nozzles that blow a stream of air over the plants as it makes its pass.



He told me that his theory comes from nature, where plants in windy areas often stay naturally compact. He has tested his theory on basil, tomato, campanula and *Callisa repens* (Bolivian Jew) and says all four were affected positively by the blast of air. This could be very important in Europe, as growers have fewer and fewer chemical options.

Now, I know you want specifics: how much air, how often and so forth. But I don't have those yet. I've asked Achim for more info and will share as soon as I have it.



Got an opinion to share? Or want to read what other folks have to say? Click [HERE](#).



New Logo for Selecta

Young plant breeder [Selecta](#) used IPM Essen as the Launchpad for a freshening of the brand and logo of the 40-year-old family business.

Angela Storm told me that Selecta One indicates “one company, one team, one approach,” and it includes bringing the global business—Europe, Africa, Asia and America—under one identity. And they’ve updated their tagline from “creating the future” (which could be for most any products) to “We love to grow,” which ties in better to what they do.

selecta 
we love to grow

Finally ...

Don't forget the Princettia webinar I'm hosting next Wednesday, February 10. You can sign up at www.ballpublishing.com/webinars. Sign up for our landscape webinar while you're there.



Now, let me leave you with something fun: a world record! Milaeger's, a garden center with locations in Racine and Sturtevant, Wisconsin, will attempt to set a new world record for most people toasting with Bloody Mary cocktails. The big event will take place Sunday, February 7, and they need 144 folks raising their glasses to take the record away from the Bloody Mary Society. The event will be at their Great Lakes Farmers Market, held every Sunday year-round at their Racine store.

I love a garden center that knows how to have a good time!

Hmmm. That's bacon, cheese and sausage in that Bloody Mary. And Racine is less than two hours from my home

Got an opinion to share? Or want to read what other folks have to say? [Click HERE.](#)

See you next time,

Handwritten signature of Chris Beytes.

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