

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Costa Buys SC Perennial/Woodies Nursery

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Tropical plant and bedding giant Costa Farms can now add two new plant categories to their list: perennials and woody ornamentals. That's what they gained in the purchase of Layman Wholesale Nurseries of Trenton, South Carolina. The deal, which gives Costa 100% ownership of the three-location, 1,200-acre business, was finalized last Friday.

GrowerTalks spoke with Jose "Joche" Smith, Costa's CEO, to find out what attracted them to the perennial market, and to Layman's in particular. When we caught up with him he was actually on location at Layman's.

"We think there's been a little bit of a blurring of the line between annuals and perennials," Joche explained about the purchase. "We like this category: Perennials have gotten better and better, more attractive plants, more low-maintenance plants ... we just think it's a category that's growing when other categories are flat. So as a general trend, [perennials are] a good place to be."

He added that it's not just perennials, even though they're 70% of Layman's business. Another 20% is woody ornamentals such as Knockout roses, hydrangeas, azaleas and so on, with the remaining 10% made up of groundcovers and ornamental grasses ... "A whole bunch of cool stuff," Joche says. We asked if they'd already been purchasing from Layman's and that's how they knew of them.

"We've done a couple of things with them in the past, but we've just always been interested in getting into this category and we thought [Layman's] was the best fit. They're a family business like us, very similar values, very good people. We'd bump into them at Lowe's or Walmart or when out visiting stores, and have had dinner with them several times over the years and talked about the possibility of doing something. But things sort of got heated up in the past few months."

For their part, Layman's is just 20 years old. The business of Barry and Debbie Layman and their children Barrett and Christina, they grow primarily for Lowe's, Walmart and Bell Nursery. All four family members are going to be staying on in key rolls after the transition, with Barry taking on a business development roll. "We're going to lean on him for all kinds of knowledge," Joche says. "We know very little about this segment." Rodney Moore, manager of Costa Carolina in Asheville, North Carolina, will take over as general manager. Chris

Copeland, GM and sales manager for Layman's, will take on a senior sales roll within Costa.

"It's a very good family business that really wasn't for sale," Joche concluded. "But we talked to them and they decided that maybe one of the best opportunities for growth was to partner with a larger partner." He added, "We think we can have pretty aggressive growth here." **GT**