

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Practice Makes Perfect

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New employees of Ball FloraPlant get real-world training on how to properly maintain stock plants and take cuttings at the company's "Las Limas" production facility in Nicaragua. Las Limas, set to begin shipping in October, is Ball FloraPlant's new site dedicated to vegetative production of spring annuals. Over the next two years, they will move all cutting production away from Linda Vista in Costa Rica, which they currently share with sister company PanAmerican Seed (geraniums will remain in Guatemala).

Ball FloraPlant is the first vegetative annual producer to set up shop in Nicaragua. Why there?

General Manager Al Davidson says the country offers a combination of excellent climate and available labor. He explains that day and night temperatures average about 4 degrees C (7F) higher than Linda Vista, which, combined with high light, will provide the best possible climate for growing spring annual crops.

As for labor, Nicaragua's economy is based primarily on agriculture (coffee and tobacco), so there are plenty of quality agricultural workers available.

Nicaragua is located between Honduras and Costa Rica, with the Caribbean Sea to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Las Limas (which was named for a citrus fruit that was grown in the area) is in the northwest near Esteli, the country's third-largest city (about 119,000 residents). Esteli is on the Pan-American Highway, for easy access to the airport.

Ball FloraPlant has purchased about 100 acres of land, upon which they'll build about 40 to 45 acres of greenhouse in several phases. Phase 1, which is just going into production, is 11 acres.

Greenhouses were built by the Spanish company Asthor. They're as big and modern as any you'd find in the U.S. Gutters soar to 18 ft., and the houses are equipped with four stages of ventilation, shading and HAF fans. Production will be in raised hydroponic troughs by Netafim, holding plastic tubs filled with volcanic rock.

One unique feature of the facility is that it is completely enclosed: Once workers enter and pass through a sanitation procedure, they don't have to leave again, as all walkways and corridors are enclosed. Rather than having to wait for trucks to make the rounds of the facility like at other offshore greenhouses we've seen, workers at Las Limas will transport cuttings by bicycle between the greenhouses and the coolers. This constant moving of cuttings to the cooler is the beginning of a complete cold chain, including the highest-quality logistics to their customers' door. **GT**