

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Gardens Alive! Buys Zelenka Out of Chapter 11

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The owner of online and mail order plant and supply company Gardens Alive! announced the purchase of Zelenka Farms for a reported \$15 million.

The purchase includes six locations in Oregon, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Michigan, North Carolina and Texas, and 1,600 employees (most of whom will be retained, say news reports). Zelenka had sales of approximately \$130 million in 2015.

Zelenka filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection back in July, citing an unusually rainy spring. But the company also had a decade of financial troubles, including a previous bankruptcy in 2003.

Who is the new owner, Gardens Alive!? It's a direct mail and now online business based in Lawrenceburg, Indiana. Founded by Indiana native Niles Kinerk in 1984 to provide "environmentally responsible products that work," the company was originally called Natural Gardening Research Center, but they changed the name in 1988.

Other Gardens Alive! businesses include Spring Hill Nurseries, Gurney's Seed & Nursery Co., Breck's Dutch Bulbs and Henry Field's Seed & Nursery Co. All of these were apparently bought out of bankruptcy, so the company has experience with this sort of turnaround.

We emailed Mr. Kinerk to find out why he wanted to add a large wholesale nursery to his portfolio, but he didn't reply by press time.

A little bit of information: Under its previous owner, Berry Farms, Zelenka had been primarily a big box supplier, with customers such as Lowe's, Kmart, Home Depot, Meijer and ShopKo. But according to the press release, the new owner plans to develop some products and programs for independent garden centers. States Mr. Kinerk in a news report, "Independent garden centers provide a great service to their local communities. I feel that a well-run independent garden center is a wonderful cultural resource, which makes its surrounding community a better place in which to live."

Another bit of information: Zelenka will operate under the Gardens Alive! trademark. **GT**