

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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From Grocery Store to Vending Machine

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This past April, the first phase of Ball Seed Company's planned renovation and expansion of the Seed Distribution Center was completed. Additional work space was, of course, one of the goals for the project, as with any expansion. But another reason Ball started construction in late 2023 was to elevate its seed inventory, packaging and distribution capabilities by using the latest technology available.

Perfect Pick from OPEX is an automated storage and retrieval system that will help Ball upgrade the way they fulfill seed orders. For over 120 years, they used the

"grocery store method," where staff would take a printed order and walk around the many shelves of different seed packets and vials, placing them in a bin and checking them off the list, until the order was completed and ready to send out.

Now, they've completely switched to a "vending-machine system," where the person filling the order tells the Perfect Pick machine exactly what they need, and the machine brings it directly to them. The days of walking around floor-to-ceiling shelves searching for seed are over—the process of filling orders will be faster and more precise. It will also allow Seed Distribution Center employees to better handle high-shipping peaks, focus on other tasks that take more time and learn new skills.

The brand-new warehouse where Perfect Pick lives is also temperature-controlled so that it maintains ideal conditions to extend the shelf life and quality of the seed.

"It's about speed of service and the capacity to grow in order to service our customer in the best way," explained John Steinlage, North American Sales Manager for Ball Seed.

Providing the best service for their customers has been a long-standing mission for Ball Seed for decades and the new upgrades to the Seed Distribution Center allows them to continue to do so—in an even better way and for the foreseeable future.

"We made this commitment as a 40-year investment," said Jim Kennedy, Senior Commercial Director for Ball

Seed. “This is our opportunity to make the best decisions for the industry’s future. When we think about our supply chain investments, our people investments or systems investments, are we stewards of it for today? Are we making the right decision for those that are coming after us?”

The shelves that used to hold all of the seed packets have been removed and that area is currently under construction as part of Phase 2 of the Seed Distribution Center renovation, which includes new cold storage seed vaults for additional inventory. The plan is for these to be up and running by the end of this month (June).

“This is a generational investment in the future of floriculture for the world coming from Ball,” said Jim. “Everything we’re investing in is to serve growers. This industry has a strong future, has a bright future, and we’re absolutely committed to that.” **GT**