GROWERTALKS

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22-acre Greenhouse Collapses in the Netherlands

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If you search online for "Dutch greenhouse collapse," you can find frightening security camera footage of the moment this giant glass tomato range collapsed, pushed by strong winds and weakened by workers who'd removed some structural beams to make room for a new curtain system.

The 9-hectare (970,000 sq. ft.) greenhouse, owned by tomato producer Agro Care and located in Middenmeer in the north of Holland, fell over in just moments Friday, June 27. Thankfully, nobody was inside at the time (4:30 in the afternoon), so there were no injuries. But 65 employees had been working in the facility earlier in the day.

"You don't want to imagine what could have happened if people had still been inside," said an Agro Care spokesperson.

Cost of the loss of the structure and equipment is estimated at 20 million euros ($23.5 million U.S.). Crop loss was minimal, however, as the tomato seedlings in the greenhouse were only three weeks old.

Middenmeer is only about 10 miles from the North Sea—a windy part of the country. If you find the video mentioned above, you can see a wind turbine near the greenhouse turning at a pretty good clip.

The cause of the collapse of the 10-year-old greenhouse was an error during renovation work, said Agro Care after an investigation. Workers were installing a second energy curtain inside and to do so they had to temporarily remove some support beams. They were supposed to be removed one at a time and then replaced, but to save time workers removed a series of them simultaneously, weakening the structure.

Said Agro Care, "A slight increase in wind was enough to undermine the stability."

Agro Care is one of the largest tomato producers in Europe, with 261 hectares of production at seven sites in three countries, so the 9-hectare loss is less than 4% of their production capacity. The company said that it'll work on a plan to rebuild the greenhouse and expects it to be back in production early next year. **GT**