GROWERTALKS

Features

8/29/2025

A Story of Family, Industry & People

Jennifer Zurko

Dan VanWingerden was born to be in the greenhouse business. And that reality became clear when he found himself out of it for a bit.

As the son of Art VanWingerden, he grew up in his father and Uncle Ken's business, ColorPoint Greenhouses based in Paris, Kentucky, working his way up to general manager until 2019 when they sold the business to a hemp producer. Dan and many of the employees stayed on to help the new owners get the hemp business off the ground. But within a year, they knew things weren't going well. Art and Ken left their positions as board members, and Dan found himself unemployed when they closed down the operation.

Dan did some odd jobs here and there for a bit. He helped some friends with building projects. But Dan knew he needed something more permanent for himself and his young family. And, preferably, in the greenhouse industry.

A VanWingerden by any other name

Then a bit of luck and some long-time industry connections paid off. David Cuthbert owned three greenhouse operations in Ohio and was looking to sell two of them. One he sold to Bonnie Plants; the other—in Orient, 30 minutes south of Columbus—he asked Dan's father if he'd be interested in purchasing it.





Dan and his dad Art drove from Kentucky to Ohio to meet his Uncle John VanWingerden, owner of Green Circle Growers, at the Cuthbert place to check it out. Dan already had thoughts of purchasing the operation himself and John encouraged him to do it.

Green Legacy, located in Orient, Ohio, was bought by Dan VanWingerden in late 2020.

So armed with nothing but family support and a couple thousand dollars, Dan went to AgCredit and asked if he could have a loan to buy the business and they immediately agreed.

I asked Dan if his last name helped a bit in securing the loan and he didn't hesitate when he said, "One hundred percent!" It's a great example of why building relationships is so important in this industry.



“AgCredit has a wonderful team and they understand the industry,” said Dan. “I’m VERY aware of what I’ve been blessed with and what I’ve been born into.”

Dan VanWingerden (far right), talks about Green Legacy with Ball Seed’s Mary Kannor, Suzie McFadden and José Sanchez.

Which is why Dan named his new business Green Legacy, to pay homage to the industry and generations of family history that helped provide him everything he needed to start his endeavor.

So, in late 2020, Dan and his wife Katie packed up and moved to Ohio to get Green Legacy going. They hit the ground running, retrofitting and upgrading the 4-acre facility, producing a crop right away for Spring 2021. During that time, Dan said he had a lot of help and support from people in the industry—not just his father and Uncle John—but also Angelo Petitti, owner of 10 garden center locations and Casa Verde greenhouses in Ohio, who gave him advice about speculative growing, specifically on Proven Winners plants; and David Cuthbert, who eventually also sold him the house on the property for Dan and his family to live. Plus, a handful of uncles who were readily available to help get them up and running.

“[David] said, ‘We want to make sure you’re successful. We’re going to help you,’” explained Dan. “Without that chance, we wouldn’t have what we have without the help of a lot of industry people.”

“Dutch confidence”

Over the last four years, Dan has been working to improve Green Legacy’s growing practices and expanding their customer base, which is made up of local landscapers and other wholesalers. Never one to back down from a challenge, this year he took 1.5 acres of land and turned it into a full-fledged trials garden complete with irrigation, raised beds and gravel paths.



Last fall, Dan was meeting with one of his landscape customers, EMI Landscape & Design, to discuss what they should buy and grow for the next season and they came up with the idea of doing a trial together. In March of this year, they picked a spot toward the front of the property and within two months had an impressive trials garden. Dan said EMI did the majority of the installation of 40,000 plants representing 600 varieties from 20 breeders in one day. Dan hired a newly graduated student from The Ohio State University, Audrey Brill, to be the trials manager and work with the breeders on the designs of the beds and securing plants.

This year, the teams from Green Legacy and EMI Landscape & Design partnered together to build a 1.5-acre trials garden. It includes 40,000 plants representing 600 varieties from 20 breeders.

Dan said he and EMI had three objectives in mind when building the trials garden: First, to show how different plants perform in the Midwest. Second, EMI wanted a place to show their own customers how certain plants looked in the landscape. And, lastly, they wanted to fill a need. There aren’t a lot of trials sites in the Midwest, especially so close to Columbus where Cultivate is held. For the last two years, Green Legacy has been part of the grower tour during

Cultivate, and this year he had many visitors take a drive down to see the trials for themselves.

The entire property is about 35 total acres—and with 4 acres of greenhouse, 7 acres for outdoor mum production and 1.5 acres of trials—there's still some room to expand to 16 acres of greenhouse, which Dan said he's already been thinking about. He's also incorporated new automation, upgraded their growing media with HydraFiber and are looking to expand into growing foliage during the winter (Green Legacy doesn't grow poinsettias). And that's just what Dan's been doing now—it'll be exciting to see what else is in Green Legacy's future.

Dan admitted that part of his gumption comes from what he calls "Dutch confidence," but he's quick to say that without the help and support from his family and industry colleagues, he wouldn't have been able to go from being unemployed to running a successful greenhouse operation of his own.
"This is what I grew up with. It's been a story of so many industry people," said Dan. "My wife and I sometimes sit back and thank God for what He's given us. And I'd love to be the one that turns around and helps someone else someday." **GT**