

# GROWERTALKS

## Acres & Acres

9/30/2025

### You Know the Old Adage

*Chris Beytes*



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“There’s always lemonade to be made.”

So concluded Marcella Lucio-Chinchilla, head of business development at Silver Vase Orchids and the current president of the Florida Nursery, Landscape & Growers Association, who’d just told me an interesting tariff tale. I’d just run into Marcella on the trade show floor of FNGLA’s The Landscape Show and, as a journalist does, I asked her how business has been so far this year.

The lemons that Marcella was referencing above was the impact of tariffs on the cost of dressing up their fine orchids with fancy ceramic pots. Marcella told me that the grocers and other retailers that Silver Vase sells to generally get quite particular about those cover pots, wanting them to be just so. But when price becomes an issue—say, when a Chinese container manufacturer raises prices due to tariffs and Silver Vase has to pass the increase along—suddenly the perfect pot is no longer the focus—it’s now “price, price, price,” she said.

But those lemons get squeezed when Silver Vase offers its customers an alternative: containers from pre-tariff inventory. Granted, they may not be quite the perfect color or pattern or shape the customer wants, but the price is right, and the price and margin at retail can be maintained, and that’s what matters. Silver Vase clears out old inventory and has space to stock new products—shopped for with tariffs in mind, perhaps from other countries with lower tariffs or made from less-costly materials.

Perhaps “silver lining” would have been more appropriate for Silver Vase than lemons/lemonade, but that was the adage she used, and I got the point.

I heard another silver lining/lemonade story at the show from Victor Rodriguez of 305 Farms in Homestead (whom I featured with his wife, Leslie, in the February issue when they won “Best Use of Plants” for the large booth category at TPIE this year). When I asked Victor about business in 2025, he told me sales were a bit soft compared to the last two years.

“Why? Interest rates slowing construction?” I speculated.

No, South Florida is booming, he replied, with new construction surrounding his 100-acre nursery. He couldn’t explain the slowdown in sales ... but he did tell me about the silver lining he’d discovered: He’s able to once again

grow his palms and landscape material up to his desired size specification. Sales had been so strong over the last few years, he was selling product before he wanted to. Again, lemonade out of lemons.

It was interesting to me that these two stories came to me unsolicited and almost back-to-back. It brought to mind Anna Ball's adage, "For every trend there's a countertrend." Or that one about the glass being half empty or half full.

Newspaper and television reporters, of course, aren't paid to look on the bright side, and if it bleeds, it leads, so any news you hear on the economic topics of the day tends to lean gloomy. A recession might be on the horizon. Consumer prices might go up. There might be a trade war. Economic growth might slow.

Or it might not!

Regardless of what negative news comes to fruition or doesn't, there's always an upside to any downturn: it fosters innovation. After all, "Necessity is the mother of invention."

I recall talking to the late David Van Wingerden years ago at his family's nursery, Green Circle Growers, in Ohio. We were looking at a new biomass boiler system and were discussing greenhouse heating costs, and I think I commented that at least gasoline and diesel prices were low, and David surprised me by saying he wished they were higher. Huh? Did I hear you right, David? Why is that? Because when oil is cheap, there's less incentive to find alternatives or develop energy-saving technologies, he answered.

David was right, of course. World War I brought us antiseptics and gave women an entry to the workplace. The Great Depression brought electricity to small towns and farms via the Rural Electrification Program. World War II brought us radar, antibiotics and the post-war economic boom that led to Levittown and the mass-produced suburban housing developments that made today's horticulture industry possible.

As Albert Einstein once said, "In the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity."

In other words, squeeze those lemons! **GT**