

Memorial Day & June 1-2; White's Greenhouse Update; Vaughn's Firefly Petunia



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

- How was Memorial Day?
- Your comments
- Up in Canada ...
- June 1-2 was a bit better
- White's deal falls through
- Inside Espoma's new factory
- Finally ...

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How was Memorial Day (and also June 1-2?)

(I didn't get out the Memorial Day scores last week because I didn't have a newsletter scheduled, so this week I'm doubling up with two weekend's worth of scores.)

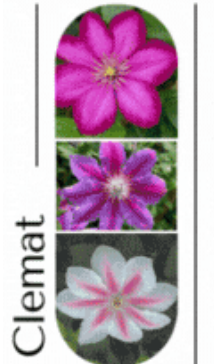
"Eh" is how Trevor Woldhuis rated his Memorial Day Weekend at his family's Illinois retail grower, Woldhuis Farms Sunrise Greenhouse. He gave it a 6 due to "okay weather and down sales."

"Eh" or perhaps "meh," as another reader said, or "acceptable" about sums up the scores: **7.2 in the U.S.** and **7.6 in Canada.** Fair scores, okay scores, but not the sort of scores that reflect nice profits for a key spring three-day weekend, especially when compared to three of the last four years:

	U.S	Canada
2023	8.9	8.9
2022	8.3	8.5
2021	7.5	8.1
2020	9.2	9.4

The 12-year average for the first weekend of June (not including this year) is 7.9 in the U.S. and 8.9 in Canada.

"Disappointing" was another word I read several times. Last year, this ranked as one of the best



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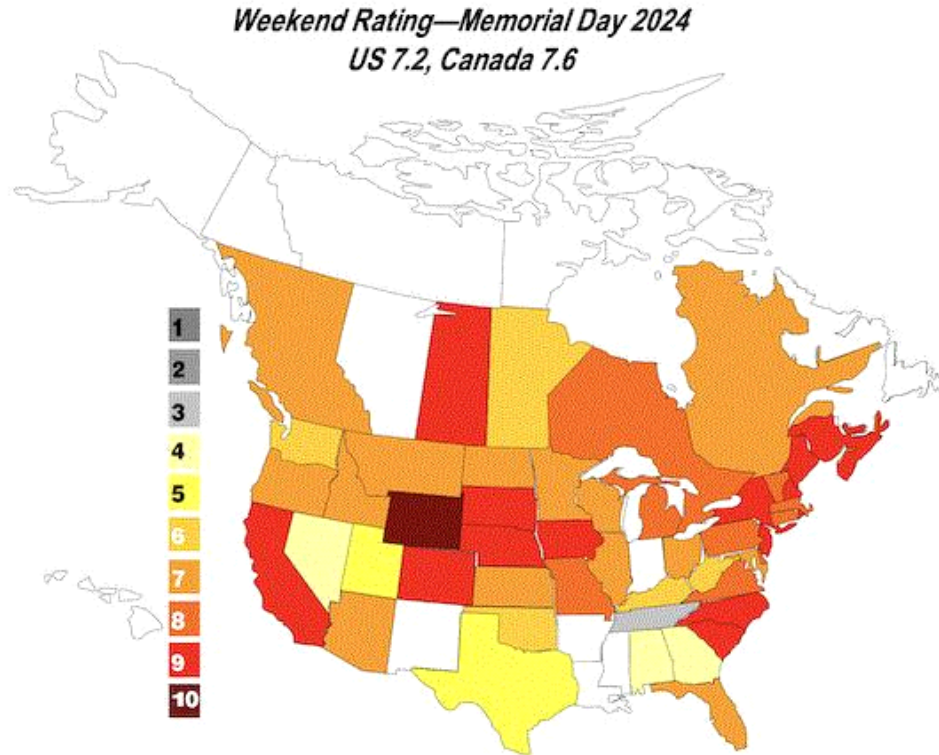
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weekends of my survey EVER—certainly in the top 6. But you have to go back to 2012 to find a lower U.S score for this date, 6.8. In Canada, only 2019 (6.6) and 2013 (7.4) were worse.

Anyway, enough gloom and doom. Here's the map:



That's based on 99 scores from 43 states and six provinces. You sent in just seven 10s (7%) and fourteen 9s (14%). You even sent a few 1s and 3s and 4s.

Regionally, New England 8.4, the Plains (8.1) and the East (8.0) led the way. And they needed it! Spring has been slow to break in the Northeast and mid-Atlantic areas. The South (5.8) had heat, while the Northwest (6.2) had wind and rain.

There were some bright spots. New Hampshire (9.4) was the highest-scoring multi-score state. I saw 10s for Wyoming, Montana and South Dakota. North Carolina (9.3) scored a pair of perfect 10s and an 8 after struggling with weather for weeks.

In Canada, nobody scored a perfect 10, which is unusual. But Ontario had a 9, as did New Brunswick and Saskatchewan.

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Your comments (in random order, not high score to low)

Virginia (6). "Memorial Day was quite pedestrian. At this point in 2024, we need a lot of sprinting days and hopefully a few record-setting dashes to get to our sales goals. So we'll keep hoping and working hard!"—*Duane Weaver, Milmont Greenhouses*

Ohio (8). "Decent weekend, but seems like the spring rush has pretty much run its course."—*Kim Grant, Strait Gate Greenhouses*

Ohio (5). "Disappointing!"—*Brian Sabo, Sabo's Woodside Nursery & Garden Center*

Nevada (4). "Disappointing weekend and Memorial Day. Perfect weather, but household economic considerations may be impacting higher-ticket items. Strong momentum versus year ago not maintained through this important weekend."—*Bruce Gescheider, Moana Nursery*

Illinois (7). "Memorial Day Weekend was more like a trip to Six Flags than a smooth Indy 500 racetrack. (*Editor's note: Candi was continuing the racing theme I used in my request-for-scores email*). Lots of rain in and out of the weekend dampened big projects. Traffic wasn't terrible and we still saw good movement in annuals and tropicals. Customers responded well to emailed specials and sales. Just not at the same volume of what it could have been without rain and damaging wind on Friday and Sunday. Overall a solid 'meh.'"—*Candi Scheuermann, Green View Companies*

North Carolina (10). "It was a great weekend for us. We saw a 57% increase in this weekend over last year. May weekends overall were down 12% from May weekends in 2023, though."—*Jake Scott, Piedmont Feed & Garden Center*

Wyoming (10). "Friday and Saturday were crazy busy, with Sunday and Monday regular busy. We are open 8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. on Monday and always hope to get out by 4:00, so it is a shorter day. Sales for the four-day period were approximately 16% above similar Memorial Day Weekend dates."—*Jeff Jones, Great Gardens*

Washington (5). "Nothing to write home about, but considering we've regressed to weather that feels more like early April instead of late May—what else can you expect? I wish I had a fresh crop of peppers, tomatoes and squashes to sell here in a couple weeks when the weather (finally? hopefully?) warms up again and people have to replace all those that have melted away in the cold and rain we've had lately."—*David Vos, Vander Giessen Nursery*

Minnesota (4). "What was a wonderful start to May has evaporated. The four-day Memorial Day Weekend was down 13% compared to Friday-Monday of last year's Memorial Day Weekend. The weather hasn't been bad. The product still looks great. The prices are still competitive. Hopefully, everyone in Cabin Country had a better weekend than we did in the cities."—*Derek Lynde, Lynde Greenhouse*

Colorado (9). "It was great. I don't give 10s. Perfection almost reached."—*Gene Pielin, Gulley Greenhouse*



More comments ...

Montana (10). "Beat last year's sales. Great weather."—*Jeri Zirbel, Caras Nursery*

Alabama (7). "Picked back up some, still down for May as a whole, but this past Saturday was better than expected based on the last week or so."—*John David Boone, Dothan Nurseries*

Kansas (7). "Sales are okay, but nothing to get very excited about. Still seeing a lot of crazy weather in this part of the country, which seems to hit at least a part of every weekend."—*Kathy Miller, Sedan Floral*

New York (9.5). "The weather was almost too perfect. Our only competition this past weekend was with BBQs, the beach and taking the boat out on the lake."—*Jim Boxberger, Monticello Farm Home & Garden*

New Jersey (9). "Finally, a start to the season."—*Mark Becker, Rohsler's Allendale Nursery*

Missouri (9). "It was a good weekend, but not record-breaking. Nice weather kept the customers flowing in, but they are mostly wrapping up spring planting, resulting in a smaller average spending per customer."—*Nancy Martin, Lilac Hill Greenhouse*

New Jersey (8). "The Memorial Day Weekend was overall very nice. Saturday and Sunday were gorgeous days with full sun and nice temperatures. Monday started off nice, but by 1:00 p.m. the rain became steady. No big deal—I still grilled some beautiful steaks for the afternoon picnic. Sales for the previous week were very good and steady, especially once the garden centers saw that the weekend was going to be nice—they booked a lot of material for shipping on Friday and Saturday. The season will end well if this week's sales are also strong."—*Bill Swanekamp, Kube-Pak*

Washington, Oregon, Idaho (6.5). "Memorial Day Weekend was cool and a bit wet in most areas here. It didn't slow everything down to zero, but it all did feel a bit sluggish on the sales side."—*Tom Van Wingerden, Van Wingerden Greenhouses*

South Dakota (10). "Whew! Another very busy holiday weekend (Friday–Monday). Challenging to just keep up with the demand and restocking, but a great weekend! And not much sign of slowing up either."—*Tim Sime, Jolly Lane Nursery*

Illinois (7). "The week was good and Saturday was as good as it can get, but Sunday was rain almost all day, so made the weekend not as good as we were hoping for. Memorial Day itself was good, but nothing special. People were in and out quickly, knowing what they wanted."—*JP, Countryside Flower Shop, Nursery and Garden Center*



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Meanwhile, up in Canada, where it wasn't a holiday ...

Ontario (9). "Last weekend was a 9! Saturday was really good. Sunday started late and stopped really early. We are also getting pretty empty, so we are indecisive about buying more in or do we sell out ...? I wish we still had more on the floor. I am afraid June might be lower than last year because of all the early sales."—*Anita VanAdrichem, Westland Greenhouses*

British Columbia (6.5). "Wet and windy."—*John Derrick, Elk Lake Garden Centre*

Saskatchewan (9). "It was a cold, windy weekend—give it a score of 9. Customer count was

higher, but the purchase were smaller.”—*Lucille Bouvier, Plant Ranch*

Ontario (8). “We have seen a drastic slowdown after the Victoria Day Long Weekend.”—*Carlos Dias, Bradford Greenhouses*

Ontario (7). “Acceptable, but lowest in the last three years for both traffic and dollars. A heat wave, and any time we approach drier conditions, it rains again.”—*Joanna Steckle, Steckle’s Produce & Flowers*

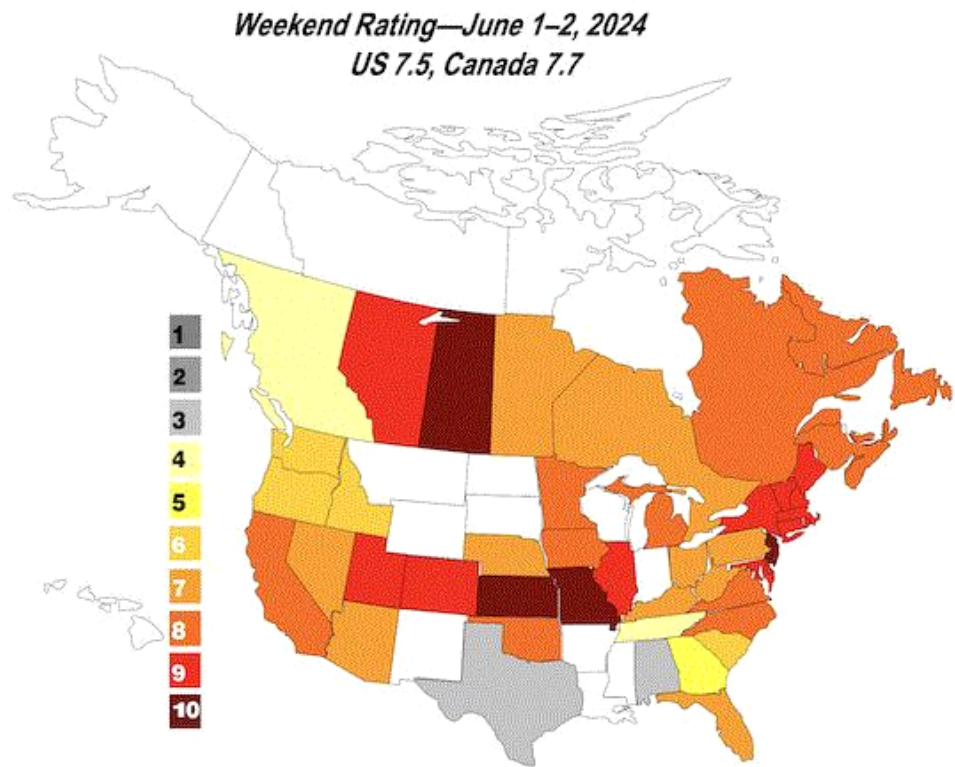
Manitoba/Northwest Ontario (6). “Manitoba has been inundated with rain and cold temperatures going into this last weekend, which is pretty much an extension from the previous weekend. Not great gardening weather, as some of the Western areas of the province got 10 cm. (4 in.) of snow on the ground. The weather started to rebound on Sunday, so hopefully the sales do, too. Still lots of product on the shelves to sell.”—*Duayne Friesen, Ball Seed*



June 1-2: A slight improvement

I’ll make this one brief: Last weekend was better than Memorial Day, but just the tiniest shade below the 12-year average for the first weekend of June. The scores: **7.5 in the U.S.** and **7.7 in Canada.** The 12-year average is 7.6/7.9. So close!

Here’s the map:



That’s based on 105 scores from 38 states and eight provinces. While some U.S. states are missing, you Canadians really delivered the scores this week. I got more from Ontario (6) than from any other single spot (Ohio was second with 5).

There were fourteen 10s (13%) and another fifteen 9s (14%, so more than a quarter of you had fantastic weekends). A few of you even set records! What dragged down the potential good scores was heat down South (5.6) and rain in the Pacific Northwest (5.9).

Also, you were up against some strong historical scores (except for Canada last year, where if I recall, the fires ruined the end of the season). Here are the previous five years:

	US	Canada
2023	8.0	6.9
2022	8.6	8.7
2021	7.9	7.0
2020	8.3	8.8
2019	8.2	8.2

Super-strong states include Kansas (two 10s), New Jersey (10, 10, 9), New Hampshire (10, 9.7, 8) and New York (10, 9.5, 9, 8).

In Texas, everything is bigger except the scores (2, 4, 4). Alabama can brag, though, that they beat 'em (3, 4, 3, 2). I mentioned the Pacific Northwest: Washington scored 5.5, Oregon 6.3 and BC was Canada's weakest at 4.2.

Just a few weekends left to report on before summing up 2024, so keep those scores coming! I appreciate all of you who participate!

Speaking of Canada, I was there this week, in Quebec, visiting my first peat bogs after just 40 years in the business. More on that next week ...



White's deal falls through, auction is next

I got an email last week from my friend Tal White, son of Norm White, asking me to give him a call, as he had an update about the status of his family's Chesapeake, Virginia, nursery. You may recall I wrote in the [February 16 Acres Online](#) about the impending closing of White's. There were some hints that they hoped to find a way to at least keep the garden center going, so I wondered if that's what Tal wanted to tell me about.

The news? Not good, I'm afraid.

Said Tal, "We had really wanted to continue on with our retail garden center and Internet shipping [which they've been doing for some 20 years], and we actually had an interested party that came in that was super interested. We had like five Teams calls, they flew in to take a look at what we were doing and how we were doing it. It was a publicly traded company within our industry and they had a specialty item they wanted us to do ... we thought it was going positively, we had to prepare proformas and all that ... But, unfortunately, we found out two days ago that it was going to cost too much to reconfigure the nursery, so they backed out."

Where's that leave White's?

"Unfortunately, we're going to end up auctioning everything off," said Tal.



Liquidation Auction: Historic White's Nursery and Greenhouse (Est. 1956) - Ends July 1, 2024

SecondBloom Auctions is handling the sale of all the physical assets of White's, lock, stock and greenhouses ... and ECHO basket lines, generators, pumps, golf carts, coolers, semi trailers, transplanters, pot fillers, pots, tractors, benches, Dutch tray systems, hoophouses, booms, injectors, sprayers ... everything. And it all must be sold by July 1. It's your chance to own a piece of horticultural history. I mean, growing in a greenhouse that Norm White grew in ... and that probably appeared on the cover of *GrowerTalks*?! Pretty cool.

The auction site is [HERE](#). Bids start a \$1. And [HERE](#) is a video showing some of the assets.

Sad news, but it's not the first time a famous business has closed and it certainly won't be the last.

By the way, if you scroll to the end of the White's auction, you'll find an entire vertical farm setup for sale. The current bid is \$999,999. Value is said to be \$9.6 million. If you want to get in on the ground floor of that burgeoning industry ...



Espoma: Investing for the long haul

This next piece is from colleague Jen Polanz, managing editor of Green Profit and Inside Grower, on her recent visit to Espoma's new fertilizer plant (I'm glad I'm not the only one around here who digs factories!):

In the September 2023 issue of *Green Profit*, we told you about the brand new Espoma fertilizer plant under construction in Hegins, Pennsylvania. I recently had a chance to check it out while

visiting a garden retailer not too far away from the state-of-the-art facility.

And when I say state-of-the-art, I mean it's a large, 60,000-sq. ft. operation with 80-ft. ceilings at its tallest, with three stainless steel storage silos on the outside, along with one silo for loading trucks and another on the inside, as well as multiple pieces of large equipment inside, all designed to dehydrate and pelletize inputs for fertilizer production. Despite its size, once operational, it should only require about five people to run it, thanks to the automation involved.

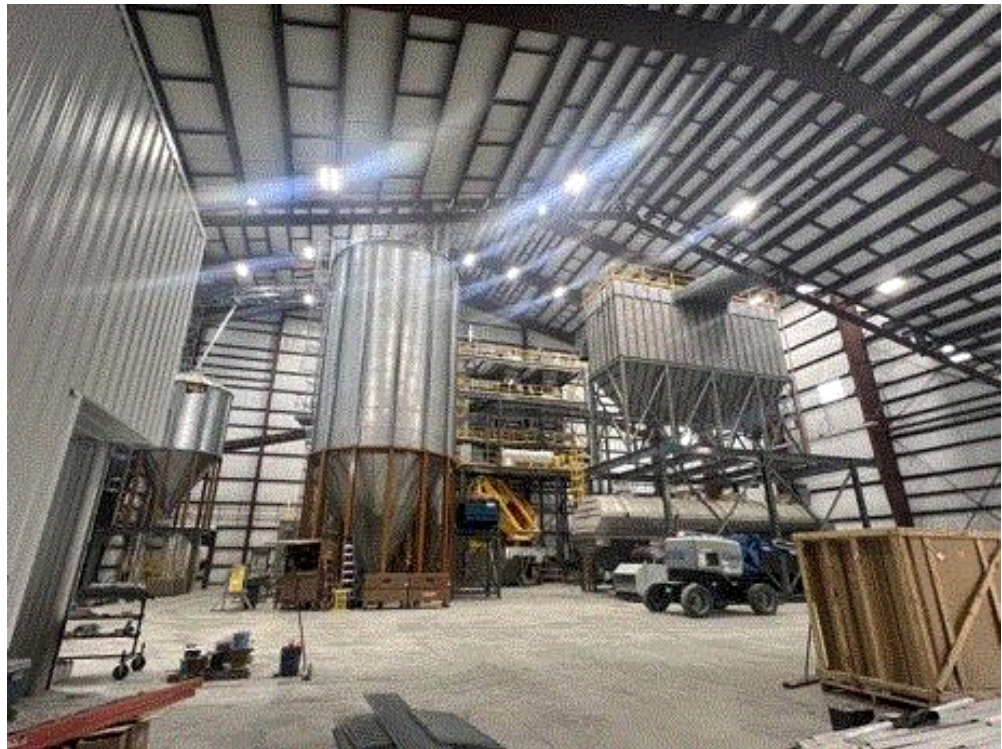


The silos on the outside of the facility, including one designed to load trucks from the top. There's a heavy duty scale built in to make sure the trucks are loaded accurately.

While I was there, Vice President of Operations Jim Meckley walked me through the process in the close-to-finished facility (they were still doing the final electrical installation and automation programming).

"These are unique lengths Espoma went to, to be able to control the quality of the product," Jim told me. "They think in terms of decades. They're thinking 50 years from now."

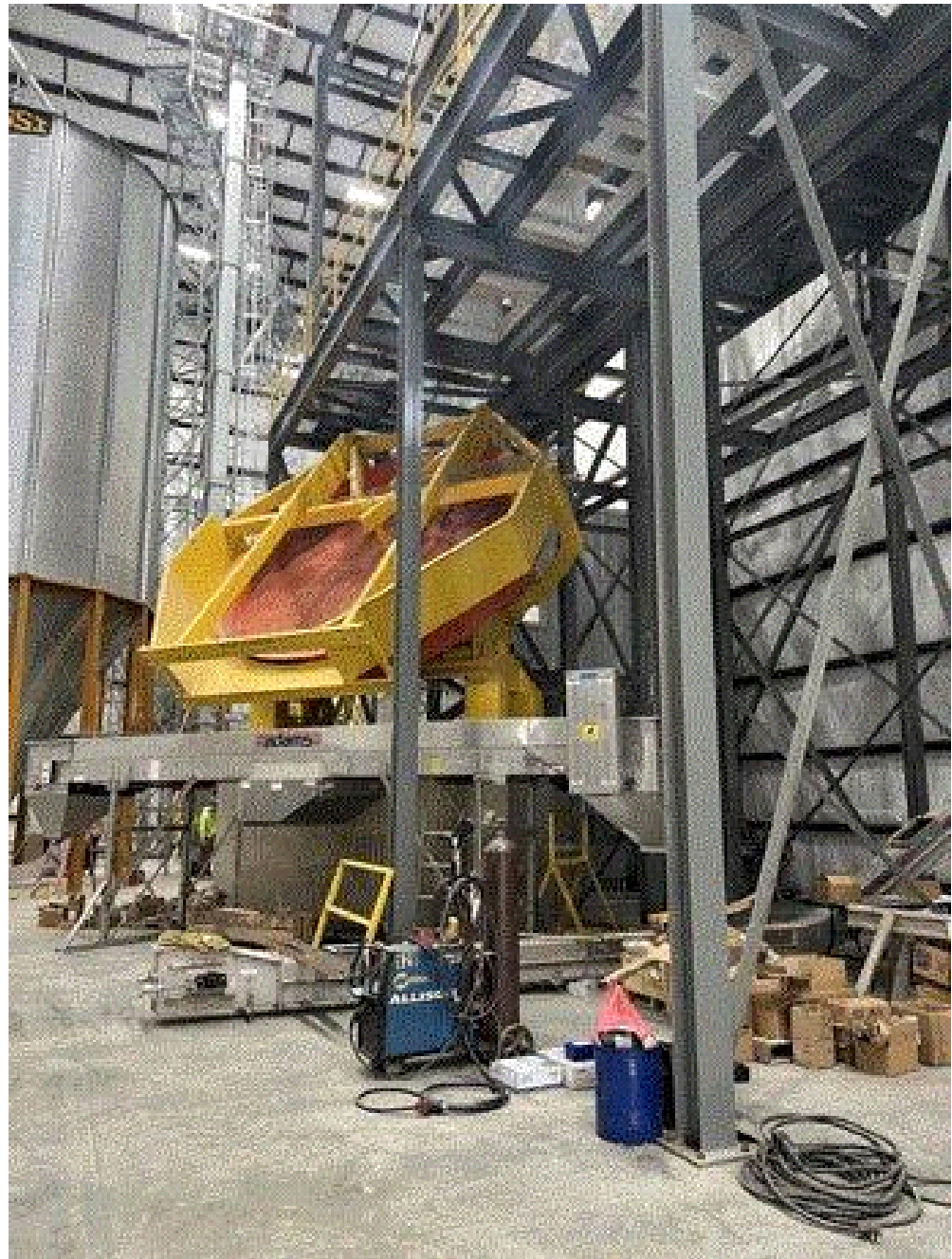
That's the goal of this operation: to bring part of the process they'd relied on other suppliers for back in-house. The main component to their fertilizer is chicken litter, which had previously been provided by those suppliers dried and pasteurized to the Espoma Millville, New Jersey, location to be blended with other ingredients, screened and packaged. The supply of that product had become erratic and unreliable, prompting the company to begin construction two years ago on the Hegins facility.



A wide view of the inside that was still in progress when I visited in early May. The goal was to be completed and receiving materials by mid to late June.

Jim's walkthrough was detailed, but here I'll just say there are multiple steps in the process once the truckloads of litter arrive that this facility is specifically designed to handle. It can come in wet or dry (a new feature that helps source materials from more suppliers) and the equipment here can produce the same end product: a pelletized, uniform dehydrated prill.

"We are the only organic producer in the country to install this kind of equipment," Jim added.

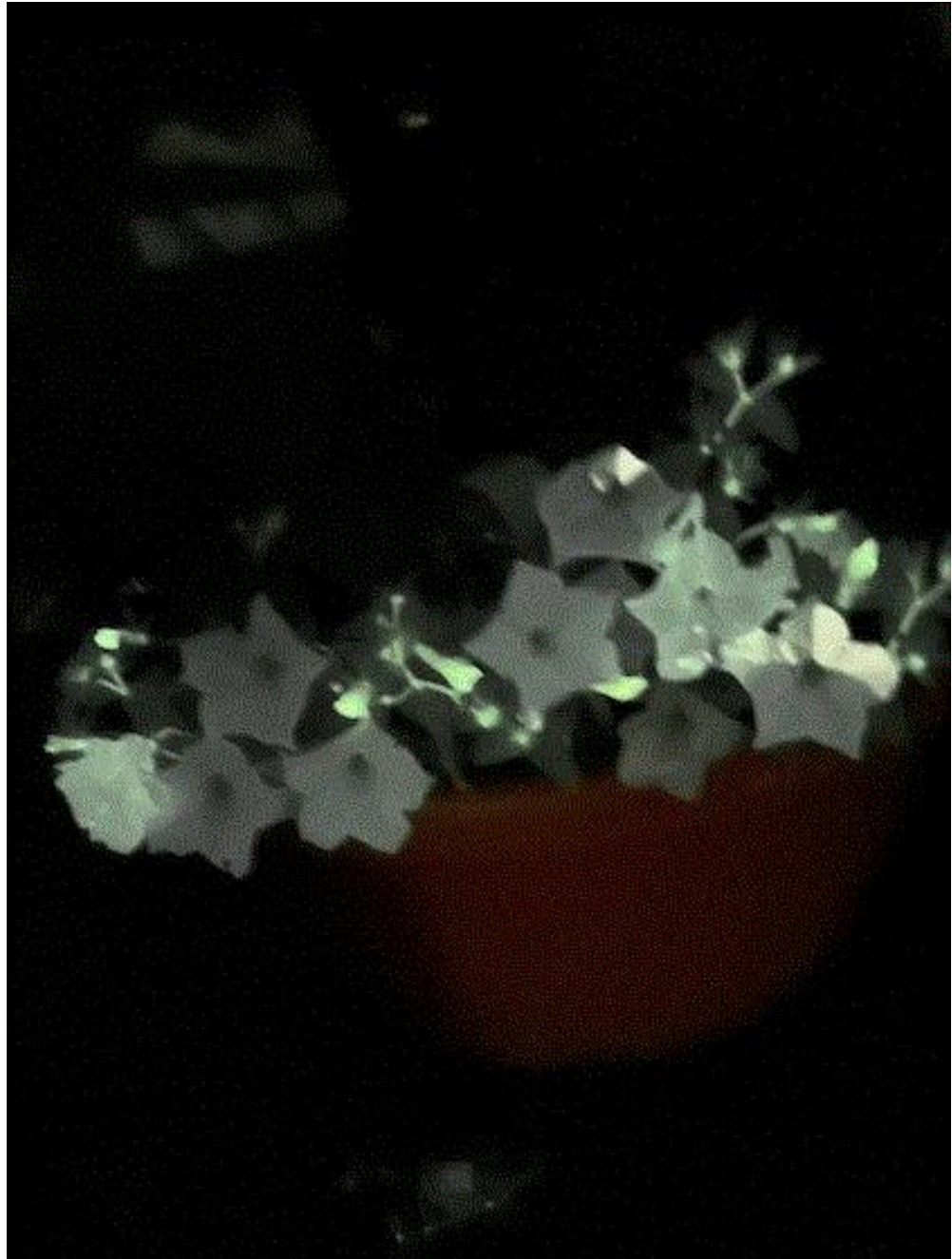


A large piece of equipment called a pan granulator, which slowly rotates the dried prills to the proper size. There are still another couple of steps after this before getting to the final product that will be sent to the Millville, New Jersey, location.

The benefits of the final product are numerous for both the consumer and for Espoma. For the consumer, there's considerably less dust and a reduced aroma, and the more uniform prills are easier to use in conventional fertilizer spreaders. For Espoma, the equipment allows them to make everything they've always made, plus explore new avenues like bulk fertilizer for commercial agriculture, landscape and turf.

I have to say, I walked away amazed by the size and scope of the building and the equipment in it. This is definitely an investment in the future!

Finally ...



If you're curious whether or not Firefly Petunia really glows in the dark like the developer says, well, our friend Vaughn Fletcher of Fletcher Consulting says it does. He bought two this spring from its developer, [Light Bio](#), and he sent me this photo, taken at his Liberty, Missouri, home at 10:30 p.m., along with these trial notes:

It is early in the development of the two Firefly Petunias I received, but in regard to the morphology of the plant, the flowers are mid-size, the plants are manifesting tight internodes and flowering profusely.

I am growing the plants on my driveway with many other containers. The photo was taken when my neighbors turned off their outside lights. The bioluminescent is only visible near the container, so from a distance it would not be that conspicuous. I think if you had a mass planting in a bed or filled a container with only the Firefly Petunia it would be more of an eye-catcher.

I look forward to observing the plants throughout the summer as they grow to determine the strength of the bioluminescence.

This is a prototype of future introductions, but there is no question the future is bright! I will forward photos throughout the summer.

Please do, Vaughn. And thanks for sharing this update!

Got your own Firefly experiences? Share them [HERE](#).

Feel free to email me at beytes@growertalks.com if you have ideas, comments or questions.

See you next time!



Chris Beytes
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