

Everde Files Ch 11; RIP Jack Bigej; At PlantCon; Wanna Write for Us?



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Everde Growers files Chapter 11

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TreeSap Farms, LLC, d/b/a Everde Growers (formerly TreeTown USA), has filed Chapter 11 in the Southern District of Texas. The company reports \$100 million to \$500 million in both assets and \$100 million to \$500 million in liabilities. Everde has 16 farms in Texas, Florida, California and Oregon.

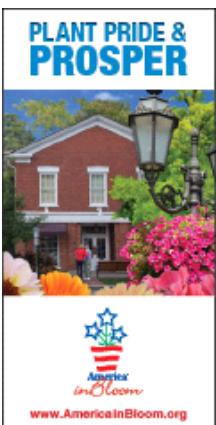
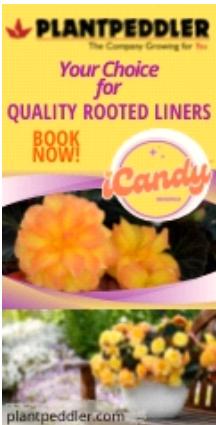
What led to the Chapter 11? I reached out to owner Jonathan Saperstein for comments (he's listed as owning 52.4% equity in the business), but he did not reply by press time, so the best I can offer for now is what the online filings state as "months of various operational and liquidity related challenges." But the documents add that Everde will continue to operate while it completes its restructuring process, and is working with advisors and stakeholders to consider strategic alternatives that will maximize value for all stakeholders.

An online Q&A continues, "These alternatives including conducting a court-supervised sale process of all or substantially all of Everde's assets to determine if there are potential acquirers of the business who will offer an acceptable purchase price."

Now Chapter 11 does NOT necessarily mean they're closing down. Everde is expected to keep operating in "business as usual" mode during the Chapter 11 proceedings. Court documents also state that Everde has sufficient liquidity to continue operations and meet obligations during the restructuring.

As for the unsecured claims, Dynasty Grower Supply claims about \$1 million, Nutrien Ag Solutions just under that, along with the California Department of Tax and Fee Administration. There are 27 more, totaling \$10 million.

I'm sorry to hear they've run into challenges. In 2017, I flew to Texas to profile TreeTown USA (as the business was then known) and I got to know Jonathan, who had just been named to *Forbes'* 30 Under 30 list. You can read my interview with him [HERE](#).



In memoriam: Jack Bigej

Sad news on the retail front: Pioneering Oregon garden center owner Jack Bigej, owner of Al's Garden Center (aka Al's Garden & Home), passed away February 26 after a battle with an aggressive form of leukemia.

Born in 1941, Jack went to work in his father's roadside fruit stand (an abandoned chicken coop) during high school. Al offered his son \$1.25 an hour plus half of anything they made above the previous year. To boost sales, Jack brought plants into the fruit stand, increasing business by \$7,400 and earning himself a check for \$3,700. "He paid me with no problem," Jack reminisced on the company website, "but he had the bookkeeper look over the books three times to make sure they were right! He couldn't believe we had done so much better. So, that's how Al's got into the plant business."

Jack took the business from Al's Fruit Stand to Al's Fruit & Shrub in the 1950s.

Al left this new side of the business to Jack and remained focused on the fruit sales, and by 1961, Jack was brought into his business as a partner. The nursery side of the business flourished, and in 1970, the old chicken coop was replaced by a new building combining the fruit and the expanding nursery business. Today, Al's Garden Center has four locations, plus a production location, and all four of Jack and wife, Deanna's, children are active in the business.

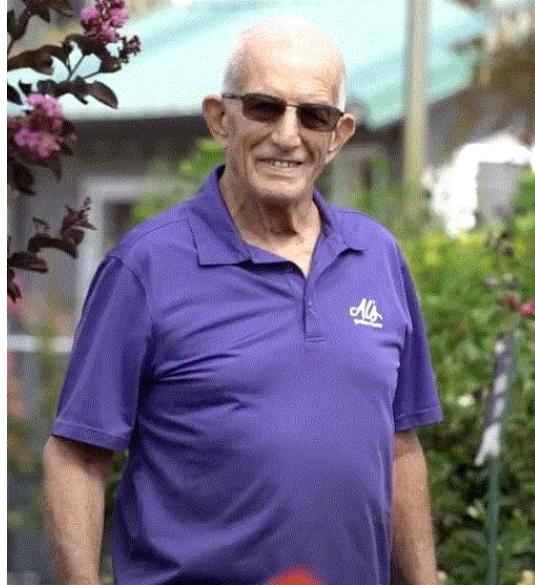
The family is planning a private mass and burial, but there will also be a public memorial and celebration of life March 10 in Mt. Angel, Oregon.

Last October, Jack was honored by Oregon State University, who inducted him into the College of Agricultural Science's Hall of Fame.

"The Hall of Fame Award is one of the highest honors that the College of Agricultural Sciences bestows," said Dean of Agriculture Staci Simonich. "It recognizes those individuals who have made outstanding contributions to agriculture and natural resources."

"I have no idea why I won this award. I haven't done anything in the industry ... I've hung around a long time," Jack said with a chuckle in [THIS VIDEO](#) by OSU. "I was flabbergasted. It should be an industry award, because it's the industry, and it's the people who make the industry."

Jack, you were one of the great people of our wonderful industry, and you will be missed!





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Digging into peat tariffs

Everybody's worrying and wringing hands over tariff and budget cut talk, but we Ball Publishing editors are hesitant to fall into the "What if?" game because, first of all, nobody knows if and what might actually happen; and second of all, every time I do read one of these stories, it always takes the completely negative, glass-is-half-empty point of view. Yes, a budget or staff cut might impact a program we need. But it might not!

After a particularly heated discussion on the topic, I proposed an idea: Just about everybody in the industry uses Canadian peat moss. How about I dig into that specific product to learn what, if anything, is being done by the peat industry about the proposed 25% tariff on Canadian goods?

They threw another chair at me, then said go for it.

First, I emailed my friend Ed Bloodnick, Grower Services and Product Development Director for Premier Tech. I asked him what Premier Tech is doing to prepare for any possible tariff that may come down the pike. He replied thusly:

"Hi, Chris. Nice to hear from you. Hope all is well.

"You know as much about the tariffs as we do. We were waiting for the final word last month for the 25% tariff that would be implemented. Then Canada made actions to comply with Trump's request to secure the borders and implementation of the tariffs was delayed a month. So here we are a month later and we are waiting to hear what will happen. That's all the news I have.

"I suggest that you contact Asha Hingorani, President of the Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss Association. She can provide the best insight on the reaction of the industry."

So I did. Here's her reply:

"Always great to hear from you.

"We have issued the following statement and you're welcome to use it as you wish.

The Canadian horticultural peat industry is concerned by the impact that potential tariff implementation could have on its U.S. grower and retail customers. The industry is thus working closely with federal and provincial governments to ensure customers are least affected and that they maintain a continuous supply critical to them. Canadian peat is a unique natural resource serving as a significant contributor to America's food security and well-being and is the substrate of choice used to grow and produce fruits and vegetables, mushrooms, soil amendments, cannabis, flowers and reforestation seedlings.



"Based on what Canadian Peat producers understand of the current version of the tariffs being proposed, they do not foresee any restrictions that would be limiting peat and peat-based products shipments to U.S. greenhouse growers.

"It's important to note that Canadian peat producers will continue to provide peat and peat-based products to U.S. greenhouse growers. As Canadian peat producers believe in best practices, planning early will only help growers and producers alike. Growers should thus speak directly with their suppliers about their individual purchase plans for the upcoming year."

Asha added the following:

"Further, we have been talking with AmericanHort on the importance (of) peat to the U.S. growers and they issued the following press release, which I'm sure you saw."

I had not, but now I have. Next is how AmericanHort hopes to mitigate peat tariffs via letters to the Administration and Congress.



The AH press release

Here is the press release of which Asha spoke, in its entirety:

COLUMBUS, OH – (February 26, 2025) AmericanHort, in collaboration with several industry associations, has submitted five letters to Congress and the Administration expressing significant concerns regarding the potential implementation of a 25% tariff on Canadian goods, specifically targeting sphagnum peat moss.

Potential Tariff Economic Impacts

Sphagnum peat moss is a critical production component in the horticultural and agricultural industries. It serves as a primary base for potting soil and growing media and plays an

indispensable role in the production of vegetables, fruits, ornamentals, and mushrooms.

"Peat moss is a vital input to our member's operations and the horticultural industry," says Matt Mika, Vice President of Advocacy & Government Affairs at AmericanHort. "With production costs already high, imposing additional costs would further drive up input and operational expenses, placing a significant financial strain on our industry."

The proposed tariff threatens to increase production costs for horticulture growers nationwide, potentially resulting in increased consumer prices of certain food products and greenhouse plants.

The letters highlight the economic impact of such tariffs. The North American sphagnum peat moss industry is predominantly based in Canada, with 85% of its production exported to the U.S. This accounts for 96% of American sphagnum peat moss imports.

The U.S. horticultural industry potentially impacted by the proposed tariff contributes approximately \$527 billion annually to the U.S. economy. Given the limited commercially viable U.S. peatlands, growers rely heavily on imports of peat-based products. The imposition of tariffs could severely impact national food security and economic stability.

Tariff Exclusion Requested

In the letters, AmericanHort urged to exclude sphagnum peat moss and peat-based products from any proposed tariffs or grant a "critical mineral" status, thereby reducing the tariff rate to 10%.

AmericanHort also noted that recognizing sphagnum peat moss as a critical resource is essential for maintaining horticultural stability, economic competitiveness, and national food security.

The five letters were addressed to the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, the House Ways and Means Committee, the Senate Finance Committee, President Trump, and Vice President Vance. These letters were signed by AmericanHort, American Mushroom Institute, International Fresh Produce Association, National Association of Landscape Professionals, and National Christmas Tree Association.

AmericanHort looks forward to working with Congress, the Committees of jurisdiction, and the Trump Administration if these potential tariffs are implemented on the horticultural and agricultural industry.

Have any other questions? Contact AmericanHort at 614-487-1117, or via email at MattM@AmericanHort.org.

Now you can see the challenge we have of trying to "report" on things like tariffs and budget cuts in Washington: things move too fast, change too often and if you do get someone to go on the record, it's not always very helpful.

But let's get practical. What would my advice be to you—at least regarding peat? Buy what you need, when you need it, and don't sweat the price. It could go up 10% or 25% due to harvest shortages or fuel surcharges as easily as by tariff. Don't sweat what you have no control over. Instead, make sure you grow fantastic plants and do that peat moss proud!



I visit the inaugural PlantCon Orlando

I first heard about it during TPIE ... I saw it on some T-shirts there, and then a young woman with a greenhouse business in Apopka invited me to visit her place ... "Oh, but not February 22 or 23," she said. "I'll be at PlantCon."

What the heck is [PlantCon](#)?

Well, let me tell you, it's like no plant sale or trade show or convention I've ever attended. It was younger, cooler, more expressive in style, dress, appearance ... it was a happening, man! Dyed hair, tattoos, piercings, gauges (those rings in the ear lobes) ... it was more like a barista convention than a plant market.



But a plant market it was, with about 70 vendors showing up for this sell-out first edition of [PlantCon Orlando](#), offering thousands of interesting houseplants (the primary focus of the event). While a few of the vendors were typical nurseries from Central Florida, many are online sellers that got their start during the pandemic, with names like Eclectic Jungle, Groovy Growing, Plant Zaddy Therapy and Sprout N' Proud (whose slogan is "Celebrating the diversity of plants and the people who collect them").





The name “PlantCon” says more about the event: A “con” is short for fan convention or fan meeting, says Wikipedia—think Comic-Con (for comic book fans) or WorldCon (science fiction). Their website describes PlantCon as “an immersive weekend experience that allows plant lovers from all over to meet and get to know one another while enjoying workshops, presentations, and parties!”

The aisles were packed with like-minded plant enthusiasts geeking out over variegations and fenestrations! Preregistration was 3,000, I was told, and I’m sure more signed up on site. And it seemed half the crowd was pulling fold-up wagons in which to haul children and their plant finds ... one clever vlogger had mounted her phone camera to her wagon so she could walk, shop and talk all at the same time.



You could find expensive rarities and plenty of bargains.



Speaking of rarities, some 1988 Air Jordans for just \$7,000. I like the gangster hats!



Experts do recommend dressing for comfort when attending a trade show.



Did I mention there were two booths offering tattoos? I've never seen that at Cultivate.



We brought home this pretty and unusual Portulacaria Cherry Blossom.



I wasn't the only press in attendance. This vlogger was equipped to walk, talk and shop.



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Meet Kenny, the founder

Kenny Nguyen is a slight young man, 30, an architect from Houston who was laid off at the beginning of the pandemic. It was then that he discovered his love of houseplants, which he would buy from individuals on marketplace. Like many, he started propagating plants to support his hobby, selling and trading with others. After driving all over Houston to do so, he organized a gathering spot in an IKEA parking lot where he and six or seven other plant nuts could gather.

IKEA customers would see the open trunks and plants changing hands and stop by to see what they were selling. That led Kenny to start the Houston Plant Market in a coffee shop parking lot, which eventually grew to 80 vendors. He even began helping these plant enthusiasts register their new businesses so they would be tax compliant. "We were helping people ease out of the layoffs and turn their side hustles into actual businesses," he told me. "Some of them are here with us today."



Kenny, calmly presiding over the mayhem. He's got a team of staff, "ambassadors," volunteers and "planterns" (interns) that help.

The city of Houston, impressed with the gathering, hired Kenny to run the city's various markets, which launched into a new career.

With the plant market so popular, Kenny saw the opportunity to take the idea to the next level—hence PlantCon Houston, which launched in 2023. He added PlantCon Dallas last year; this year he added PlantCon Orlando and, in August, PlantCon New York. He seems to have created something hot!

"We realized that right now there aren't really any hobbyist or enthusiast plant conventions for people who are just in it for the hobby and for all plants. What exists right now is like the International Aroid Society and TPIE (which he attended this year for the first time) ... these are either trade shows, or they're very specific. And these had been run for a while, so I thought a lot of the Millennial and Gen Z generations were feeling a bit alienated from those spaces, so I thought that [PlantCon] is an event I would like to go to—I want to create something for people who are younger, to be included in this horticultural hobby, because this is how we shepherd it into the next generation and keep the hobby growing, keep the plant economy growing, and be sure everyone has a place in it."

Kenny's plan? Ten cities in 2026. The parent company of all of this new market activity is With Heart Collective, a 503(c)(3) non-profit that operates [PlantCon International](#), the Houston Plant Market and more ... even The Little Plant Library, a place for exchanging plants—take a plant, leave a plant!

By the way, if you're in Texas, check out PlantCon Houston May 31-June 1 at the NRG Center.

There seems to be a whole new subculture of plant enthusiasts out there ... now how do we get to know them better? I asked Kenny about that.

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Kenny's suggestion for garden centers

Seeing the passion and enthusiasm among this new generation of plant geeks at PlantCon Orlando, I asked Kenny what traditional garden centers might do to attract them to their stores. He offered this:

"I think all of it is about the opportunity to connect with your community. I've made friends going to garden centers and bumbling by somebody and making a comment about a plant that they've picked up ... we start to chat about it, about their plant journey, and I've made friends that way, so ... if people know that there are opportunities to make friends and meet people who are like them and share their interest, it has so much appeal beyond just purchasing."

"Because gardening and plants can be an isolating hobby—a lot of it you do in isolation, on your own, right? It's not really a group activity a lot of times. So the only group activity part of it is the shopping. So if you can bring that community aspect into the shopping, I think that will draw a lot of people. It resonates with the Millennial and Gen Z generations who are coming into the hobby now."

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Congrats to TPIE, a top 50 trade show

Speaking of TPIE and tropical plants, the [Tropical Plant International Exposition](#) (of which I am a long-time planning committee member, for full disclosure) has been recognized by *Trade Show Executive* magazine as one of the country's 50 top growing trade shows (based on growth between their 2023 and 2024 events). There are three categories in which *TSE* measure growth—increased exhibit space, increased exhibitors and increased attendees—and TPIE is being recognized in all three categories. Well done!

We all know the tropical plant and houseplant world is on fire (as witnessed by the PlantCon item above), and this is further proof. FNGLA's Billy Deal told me that between 2020 (the last time TPIE was in Ft. Lauderdale before a three-year hiatus over in Tampa due to construction on the Broward Convention Center) and 2024 when the show returned "home" to Ft. Lauderdale, the event grew from 380 to 435 exhibitors, plus more than 200 booth spaces. Some of those exhibitors were new companies, founded by Gen Z and Millennial plant enthusiasts. Also, between 2023 and 2024, the show drew more than 1,300 additional attendees.

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THRIVE and FLOURISH from Ball Seed offers plant recommendations, planning resources and trending plants for the landscape and retail markets.

Horticultural distributor Ball Seed has just released the 2025 edition of its combined THRIVE and FLOURISH printed and online brochure for pro landscaper solutions and garden center inspiration. Says Ball, “This annual guide puts expert plant recommendations in the hands of greenhouse growers to help them build top-performing landscape programs and engage their retail customers.”

The topics and categories are curated by Ball Seed Landscape Business Manager Jeff Gibson, with the goal of “growing” the next generation into the gardeners they aspire to be. To that end, the 2025 guide showcases dozens of new introductions, plus tried-and-true varieties for across North America.

“Growers have an opportunity to engage the next generation on many levels and build lasting bonds between the plants they offer and what the consumer seeks from the green industry,” Jeff says. “The good news is this new generation is already drawn to plants, and this year’s THRIVE and FLOURISH guide connects the grower to the current market trends.”

The 2025 THRIVE and FLOURISH guide is available online through an [interactive flip-book virtual experience](#). Or contact your Ball Seed sales rep or your Ball ColorLink associate (at 800- 879-BALL) to request your printed copy.



BallSeed 2025 TOP PERFORMERS



Lego flowers at Costco

Check out these cool and colorful Lego flowers that Costco has been selling! I'll bet more adults than children are assembling them.



I suppose one could worry that they might replace a live plant in a home, but I doubt it ... if anything, looking at this would make me want the real thing.

Finally ...

Are you a head grower or production manager at a wholesale growing operation? Do you have a lot to say about growing, production and the industry and need an outlet to express those thoughts? Is writing for *GrowerTalks* a long, unfulfilled dream of yours?

Well, it's your lucky day, because we are looking for a contributor to our Growers Talk Production column! Three times a year you'll get to write 600 to 800 brilliant words to share what's going on in your greenhouse. Things you've learned, things that drive you crazy, things you wish you'd learned years ago ... anything that might help your fellow grower. You'll earn a few dollars, and you'll get your name on the masthead as part of our contributing staff!

Interested? Email Editor Jen Zurko at jzurko@ballpublishing.com to see if you've got the chops!

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

See you next time!

Chris

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