

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

1/1/2021

Gloeckner's Reaches Distribution Agreement With Ball Seed

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Joe Simone, the longtime owner, president and CEO of Fred C. Gloeckner & Company, announced his plans to retire from the Harrison, New York, distribution center he's owned since 1990 (he started with Gloeckner in 1975). But Joe's succession plan is a bit unusual: Rather than sell the business intact, he's come to an agreement with Ball Horticultural Company to transfer Gloeckner's open orders to Ball Seed, its distribution division. Gloeckner orders were shipped by Gloeckner up to December 18; now all orders are managed by Ball Seed.

Why this deal? And why Ball?

"I've been very fortunate to know Anna for many years as a customer of PanAmerican [Seed]," he replied, "But not until we worked together in the Seed Your Future organization did I begin to understand that the way we approached our businesses and our people was very similar—the cultures were quite similar indeed. Also, it was evident that we had a common interest in seeing good research work continue and developing our staff for the future."

Joe said there's no succession plan for the business. When asked why he went for this deal instead of selling the business intact, he said, "In working with Todd Billings and Al Davidson [Ball Horticultural's Director of New Business Development and President, respectively], this path was the best way for the smoothest transition for our customers and our people. We have great respect for the Ball organization, and know our customers and vendors will be in good hands. When two organizations get together from a position of strength in the markets they serve, it usually works out best for customers and employees."

Joe is conscious of the legacy of the company and feels that Ball will best preserve that, even if the Gloeckner name will go away in the process.

"We have many long-time employees—several in excess of 25 years," Joe said in a press release. "Our history of dedication to customers, vendors and to colleagues has been very strong. It is similar to the culture found at Ball, which makes this an excellent transition. This agreement allows the Gloeckner investment in people, innovative products and high-quality customer service to be entrusted to an established and respected platform at Ball Seed."

Gloeckner's, which was founded in 1934 by Fred and his father, Carl and Leonard J. Seiger, has a product line that includes flower bulbs, specialty cut flower crops, potted plant programs, seed and other grower supplies for North American customers. It also has built significant business in Latin America through subsidiaries and agents throughout Central and South America. Additionally, they operate a state-of-the-art bulb treatment facility in Clackamas, Oregon, where they process millions of specialty flower bulbs for the U.S.

market.

Gloeckner has long been a major supplier of bulb crops and they'd merged with Ednie Flower Bulbs in 2016, with Ednie now a division. Joe and the den Breejen family will continue to operate Ednie and manage its supply chain and technical support for all product lines, which they'll distribute exclusively through Ball Seed.

"[Ednie] has always been what I spend most of my time on and I am looking forward to having a greater focus on flower bulbs and related products," Joe told me. "Ednie has a good reputation in the growing world of specialty cut flower products, too, which will continue to develop with the help of Ball's sales efforts."

The Ball Seed angle

For the Ball perspective, Al Davidson said that two of the biggest wins of the arrangement are the bulbs and cut flowers, which are "adjacencies" for Ball Seed, not core products like bedding plants. Gloeckner is the largest distributor of bulbs in the U.S. and possibly North America, Al said.

"This gives us an opportunity to really strengthen our cut flower offering and our bulb offering—quite hot crops," he said, adding that Gloeckner is also strong in potted plants and houseplants.

As for fully acquiring the business and keeping the Gloeckner name alive, Al replied, "Gloeckner's got a great name in the marketplace, and yeah, we did think about that, especially down in Central and South America where Gloeckner is an extremely strong name. But we felt to reduce complexity and drive a smooth transition it was best to consolidate under the Ball name."

To help with the business transition, Al says they're working on bringing several of Gloeckner's office and sales staff over to continue research into key markets and products, and develop new and existing relationships with vendors worldwide.

"Our goal will be to take the best of Ball Seed and the best of Gloeckner and put them together to provide the highest level of service to the Gloeckner customer," Al says. **GT**