

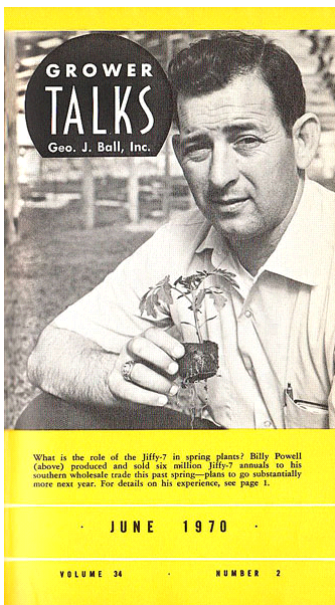
GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

11/1/2021

In Memoriam: Billy Powell

Chris Beytes



A Texas horticultural icon has passed away. Billy Powell, founder of Powell Plant Farm of Troup, Texas, died September 8 at his home in New Summerfield. He was 87.

Born in Waco in 1933, Billy grew up in LaRue, graduated from La Poyner High School and attended Henderson County College (now Trinity Valley Community College). He married Ada Ruth Haws and the couple were wed for 68 years. Early in their marriage, Billy served in the Army, where he was assigned to be a cook stationed in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He would use his cooking skills throughout his life.

In 1957, the couple started Powell Plant Farm, which consisted of just a greenhouse and a roadside stand. From that humble start, Billy became a leader in the industry, serving as president of the Texas Association of Nurserymen, frequently appearing in grower magazines, garnering many awards and recognitions, and eventually owning the largest nursery operation in Texas and second largest in the U.S. (Billy sold the business to Color Spot in 2007. It's now an Altman Specialty Plants location.)

Pictured: Billy Powell on the cover of the June 1970 GrowerTalks.

Billy also loved farming and ranching. As owner and operator of 5P Farms, he became a leader in the Brahman cattle industry, winning Grand Champion at the International Brahman Show and the Houston Livestock Show. He was also a pioneer and leader in the deer-breeding business.

Billy also helped found Timberline Nursery in Hillister, Texas, for friends Sidney Allison and Walter Umphrey. Walter was a Texas attorney noted for being part of the historic lawsuit between Texas and the tobacco industry, which led to a \$15.3 billion award to the state. Walter and Sidney relied heavily on Billy's recommendations of people, product types and automation processes to get off to a strong start. (Coincidentally, Walter passed away the day before Billy after a lengthy illness.)

Billy in *GrowerTalks*

We're not sure how many times Billy may have appeared in *GrowerTalks*, but we do know Vic Ball put him on the cover of our June 1970 issue for a detailed 10-page story titled "Six Million Jiffy-7s at Powell Plant Farm" (back then, Ball Seed was the exclusive Jiffy-Pot representative for America).

The business was 13 years old and already up to 170,000 sq. ft., with multiple innovations that impressed Vic greatly, from the use of the new compressed Jiffy-7 peat pots, to their transplanting room, to their loading room, which featured the same sort of “supermarket”-style pulling and packing used in the most modern “lean” greenhouses.

Exclaimed Vic in his opening sentence, “Here is an innovator among bedding plant producers!” **GT**