

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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American Farms Gets New Owner/Investor

Chris Beytes

Naples, Florida-based American Farms has become the newest member of the eclectic Hoffmann Family of Companies with the sale of a majority (75%, according to local news reports) of the business to entrepreneur David Hoffmann.

It's eclectic because the Hoffmann holdings include more than 240 businesses worldwide (but primarily in Florida, Missouri and Illinois), including quite a few wineries, two minor-league sports teams, lots of golf courses, a florist (Kaleidoscope Floral), a garden center (Town and Country Nursery), a tree farm (Ferguson Valley Nurseries), an organic herb farm (World Wide Farms), Segway Tours of Naples, an Everglades airboat tour outfit, several day-cruise boat lines, a gourmet cookie company ... and now a 90-acre wholesale bedding plant nursery.

How have they come to invest in such a broad mix of businesses? David Hoffmann says on his company's website, "We invest in the people and business of the communities we love to visit and live in."

David and his wife, Jerri, have a strong interest in hospitality, but an equally strong interest in agriculture, based on the vineyards, golf courses and other land holdings listed above. In fact, the garden center and tree farm (both in Missouri) were purchased days apart in August 2021. They acquired the herb farm (in Woodstock, Illinois) in the fall of 2020.

One profile of the organization is headlined, "Entrepreneurial family has invested \$500M and is just getting started."

The bigger news is that this is just the beginning of his foray into floriculture, as he added in the company press release, "We will be acquiring other flower farms in Florida and across the country as well."

How the deal came about

How did the Hoffmanns come to know about American Farms?

"We hired an Investment Bank to market the company and they sent out a prospectus to many candidates in the industry, as well as the private equity world," said American Farms co-owner and Managing Director Christine Raber via email. "Hoffmann's investment bank in Chicago, Osprey Capital, received the prospectus and they made us the best offer and the best fit for our company."

As mentioned earlier, Hoffmann bought a majority share, but not full ownership. What does that mean for Christine and partners Jim Pugh (director of horticulture) and Alejandro Salazar (operations director)?

"We had been looking for a succession plan, as all three of us have been hard at it for quite some time," Christine answered. "We are taking this opportunity to expand our management team so that in three years' time those of us who want to phase out can or just phase into a different role. We are lucky in that we don't have to move to a warmer climate to retire; we can just stay and enjoy our beautiful community that we have had little time for so far!"

We asked if she knew what expansion plans the Hoffmanns might have for the nursery.

"We had already begun expanding before the sale," she answered. "We are developing 10 more acres of growing area, as well as more propagation to accommodate the growth we are seeing in our existing business segments."

Lastly, we asked Christine about David's comment about more acquisitions, but if she knows what he's up to, she's not spilling the beans.

"Who knows what business may spark his interest next, but there are no plans that we know of at the moment." **GT**