

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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In the Thick of Things

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If I would have taken this photo a week earlier, you wouldn't have seen any black weed barrier at all. Ron Van Der Hengst said that they'd just pulled a large shipment for their Lowe's and Sam's Club customers when I paid a visit the first week of May.

Ron and his brothers Alex and Tim own South Central Growers in Springfield, Tennessee, north of Nashville. At over 1 million sq. ft., including 16 acres for outdoor production, this second-generation business was busy and bustling, moving product from the flood floors to the racks to the shipping area to the trucks. South Central's sales reach extends to four surrounding states, plus Arkansas and Oklahoma, where they partner with Pleasant Valley Farm to supply annuals and perennials for Lowe's.

As Ron was driving me around the facility in a golf cart, we chatted about his thoughts for Spring 2022—did he think it was going to be just as good as the last two pandemic years?

"My gut tells me that it'll be trending more toward 2019 numbers," said Ron. "The weather and inflation will be factors that affect that."

Spring had just sprung when I was there—late, just like the rest of the country. And that caused the need to shift things around a bit. Ron admitted that they had to "make some changes within the last month," including dumping some young plants that weren't selling and focusing on larger, in-ground bedding items. After a certain amount of time, Ron said they just stopped producing as many packs.

One of the themes of my spring travels still included worries about the supply chain, but in a different way—growers and retailers were able to place orders for pots, growing media and other inputs, but if you actually wanted them to get to your facility, you had to pay double or triple the cost. Because of this, vendors and suppliers have been encouraging their customers to order early.

South Central heeded that advice—Ron said everything for 2023 has already been ordered. **GT**

