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greenhouse management & production



Upgrades
help boost
potted plant quality

Dennis Bloom and
Bryce Johnson
Red Oak Greenhouses
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Greenhouse Structures | Season-Extender Plants | Containers

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GMPRO's Combo Chef
Mixin' it up
with Dummen USA and
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COVER FEATURE



8 | UPGRADES HELP BOOST POTTED PLANT QUALITY AT RED OAK GREENHOUSES

Ingenuity and automation keep plants moving year-round

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ON THE COVER

Dennis Bloom and Bryce Johnson of Red Oak Greenhouses know that innovation is important, but adopting automation should not lead to sacrificing quality. See Page 8. Photo by Kelli Rodda.



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Ingenuity, automation keep plants moving year-round



Red Oak Greenhouses in Red Oak, Iowa, operates 52 weeks a year under the direction of vice president Dennis Bloom (left) and general manager Bryce Johnson.

THE HUMAN ELEMENT is equally as important as the technology factor at Red Oak Greenhouses. General manager Bryce Johnson knows senses like sight and touch help create a quality crop in tandem with motors and mother boards.

The 17-acre potted plant grower in Red Oak, Iowa, is operational 52 weeks a year, so Johnson relies on man and machine to crank out plants to big boxes, grocery chains and florists.

The plant selection is plentiful — bulbs, tropicals, kalanchoe, Reiger begonia, cyclamen, gerbera, gloxinia, exacum, African violets, ornamental peppers, Christmas cactus, Boston fern, garden mums and potted spring annuals. Red Oak's specialties are mums, poinsettias and Easter lilies, Johnson said.

The 32-year-old Johnson embraces

Red Oak Greenhouses

Founded: In 1879 by Dick Jensen.

Locations: One in Red Oak, Iowa, and one just outside the city limits.

Crops: Bulbs, tropicals, kalanchoe, Reiger begonia, cyclamen, Easter lilies, gerbera, gloxinia, African violets, ornamental peppers, poinsettias, Christmas cactus, Boston fern, garden mums and potted spring annuals.

Market: Big-box stores, grocery chains, nurseries and florists within a 450-mile radius.

Production space: 17 acres.

Red Oak turns Mother's Day mayhem into profitable solution

Red Oak Greenhouses was slammed with 3-4 feet of flood waters for 18 hours the Monday before Mother's Day 2007. Heavy rains caused the Nishnabotna River to overflow its banks. The flood engulfed 8 acres of greenhouse space during the company's busiest time.

"The employees had to wear hip waders because of the high water," said general manager Bryce Johnson.

Red Oak's electric carts wouldn't work in the water, so crews used four-wheelers to pull racks out of the ranges.

"Luckily, most of the plants were on benches, which kept most of them out of the high water," he said.

automation like much of his generation, but knows the value of a dedicated employee like that of his grandfather's generation. Innovation is important, but adopting automation should not lead to sacrificing quality, he said.

Mechanized assistance

Red Oak uses two transplanters, including a new Urbinati set up this spring. The new transplanter increased efficiency by up to 60 percent, he said. The company also uses a Space-O-Mat from Visser, which shaved off three weeks of spacing time at Red Oak's older of its two facilities.

An Echo hanging basket line and rolling carts alleviate a lot of labor and the Priva environmental control system fine-tunes production in old and new greenhouses.

Under cover

The company has undergone a couple of expansions, including a 2½-acre Nexus natural ventilation house six years ago and a 1-acre Rough Brothers Venlo glass house this year.

Most of Red Oak's crops perform well in the natural-ventilated house.

"It's one of the best structures for



The greenhouse enjoys faster turns in its glass house range.



Poinsettias are a major Red Oak crop. Beyond the traditional varieties, Red Oak also grew almost 8,000 painted poinsettias last year. This year the grower is testing Ecke's Orange Spice for a fall sales item.



Echo basket lines are one of the many pieces of automation found at Red Oak.



Red Oak sticks its own kalanchoe.

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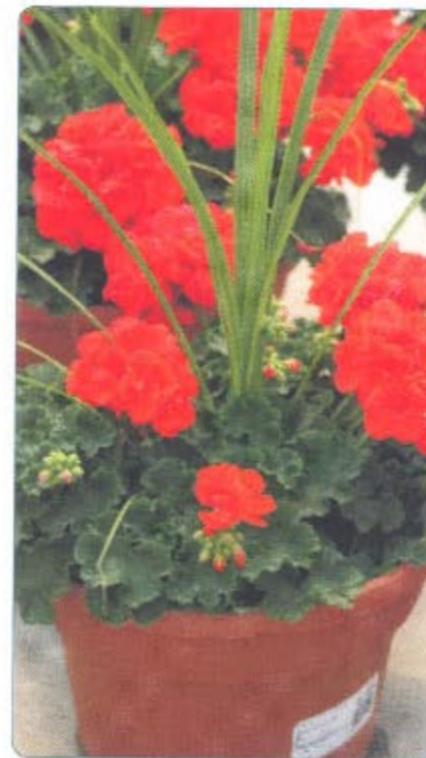
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Combo planters are one of Red Oak's season-extender sellers.

spring and summer crops," Johnson said. "During the summer the structures remain warmer during the day because of the passive ventilation. We have less loss due to the constant movement of air in this range."

The crops that come out of the natural ventilated range are better toned and more compact, he said.

The Rough Brothers house allows Red Oak to grow smaller runs of crops and treat the plants to their specific growing requirements, Johnson said.

"We have better light transmission with a glass house, which allows for a drier and faster producing house. The product matures faster with less stretching, so we get faster turns with a glass house," he said.

The Nexus and the Rough houses are equipped with flood floors. The flood floors in the Rough range have a collapsible barrier, which makes product movement easier.

"With the flood floors, we are able to be a lot more efficient in our water usage and practices," he said.

FOR MORE: Red Oak Greenhouses, (800) 831-4144; bryce@redoakgreenhouse.com. ■■