

# A WEEK IN PARAÍSO

WITH MANY CHANGES OCCURRING AT ONE OF COSTA RICA'S LARGEST CUTTING SUPPLIERS, GROWERS NOW HAVE MORE OPTIONS THAN EVER BEFORE. *By Jasmina Dolce*

In September 2009, I visited the Florexpo facility in Paraíso, Costa Rica, and learned all about the 130 million cuttings they produce each year, sanitation protocols, their sustainable practices and so much more. In the December 2009 issue of *GPN*, I highlighted some of the their business practices and production programs.

I was once again invited to Costa Rica by owner Fernando Altmann Sr. and his son, production manager, Fernando Altmann Jr. last November to participate in the company's second Florexpo Week. This event brings together breeders, growers and brokers from around the world to take part in variety presentations and tours of the Florexpo facilities.

Since my last visit, Florexpo has gone through

quite a few changes from its distribution network to quality control, and I got a firsthand look at it all.

## Expanded Distribution Network

One of the biggest changes at Florexpo occurred within its distribution network. At the time of my first visit three years ago, Florexpo's cuttings were available to U.S. growers only through one distributor. Today, growers have access to Florexpo's varieties through a number of brokers including McHutchison, Ball and Gloeckner.

This expanded network is part of the reason Florexpo Week began two years ago. With a much larger network, this event has made it possible for Altmann as well as his broker partners to meet with growers and breeders face to face to discuss business strategies, new variety introductions and trends going forward.

## Quality Control

Florexpo has taken into consideration feedback from its grower customers and made enhancements to reduce errors in product quality. With the company's new and improved quality control department, two people are dedicated to the generation of weekly reports and attention to quality-related issues notified by customers. The way these reports are made and the information contained has evolved to adapt to the needs of customers and their production process.

Quality control supervisors are now able to use weekly reports to see: team leader; harvester; time and date of revision; greenhouse and variety; and quality problems related to counting problems, stem length, uniformity, age of cutting, pest/disease, mechanical damage and flowering plants.

This new quality control process has led to better turnaround time, feedback being sent quickly to production, individualized attention and timely solutions to everyday issues.

## New Callused Cutting Program

To help growers minimize crop time and eliminate loss, Florexpo is now offering callused cuttings for its most common varieties. These include achillea, artemisia, buddleia, euphorbia, phlox, plumbago and salvia.

For customers ordering callused cuttings, the method is as follows:

1. Florexpo receives the customer order
2. Production department determines the harvest week depending on the crop
3. Unrooted cuttings are harvested and sent to an exclusive house for these products (under specific conditions)
4. Trained employees handle the products (cuttings are planted in trays and later extracted from media and cleaned)
5. Quality control team checks the process from the initial harvest to final shipping



*Florexpo Week attendees learn about the facility's highest production protocols during a greenhouse tour.*



6. Material is packed and sent in cardboard boxes with ice packs

### Rooting Area Improvements

Some of the biggest changes at Florexpo were in its rooting area. Vast improvements have been made in media, tray size, feed, scouting program, pest/disease control and cleanliness/sanitation.

Before, rooting media was comprised of saw dust and rice hulls. Today, coco peat with pumice rocks are used. Results have been improved uniformity, shortening of rooting time, healthier liners and 25 to 50 percent less material needed in production.

In regards to feed, a standard foliar feed was used in the past. Now, Peter's 20-10-20 and 15-5-15 are used at rates of 100- to 250-ppm nitrogen depending on age. This has resulted in healthier liners and shorter crop times.

To decrease negative impacts due to pests and diseases, the scouting program at Florexpo has undergone improvements. A weekly spray program has been implemented according to scouting reports. Other improvements include rotation of products used, and corrective and preventative applications for both foliar and soilborne pathogens.

### Continued Sanitation

Sanitation continues to be an important aspect of greenhouse protocols at

Florexpo. During my first visit three years ago, I was introduced to the specific protocols implemented to ensure healthy and clean stock. After my latest visit, I quickly learned that the greenhouse protocols have continued and some are even more stringent.

Each greenhouse has a three-door entrance. Anyone entering the greenhouses must suit up into cloaks and aprons, and step into disinfectant upon entering and exit. Hands must be washed and sanitized, followed by latex gloves while inside the greenhouses.

Workers in the greenhouses use three knives, which are kept in the same type of disinfectant used when entering the house. When pinching plants, workers change knives between each plant so nothing carries over from plant to plant. Throughout the greenhouses, yellow markers hang above the benches to indicate where workers must disinfect their gloves and aprons.

### Into the Future

Because Florexpo has undergone some major changes recently, the company is still working out kinks and implementing improvements every day. The company relies heavily on feedback from its customers to move forward with improvements. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to voice them! According to Fernando Altmann Sr., his business has always been 50 percent quality and 50 percent customer service.

### A GLIMPSE INTO FLOREXPO'S PRODUCT OFFERING

During Florexpo Week, I sat in on presentations given by breeder companies to growers and brokers. Here is a glimpse into some of the new varieties offered at Florexpo.

#### ► Phlox Paparazzi (Amerinova).

New genetics from Amerinova have brought a unique phlox to the market: Paparazzi. This new series combines the early flowering of Phlox subulata with the early and midsummer performance of other phlox species. This very tough perennial is highly floriferous and exhibits great heat tolerance. They can be used in the landscape as well as in containers and are easy to maintain.



#### ◀ Geum Cocktail Series (CNB New Plants).

Bred by Brent Horvath of Intrinsic Gardens, 'Cosmopolitan' is a new addition to the Cocktail series. Hardy to Zones 4 to 9, Cocktail varieties can be used in spring borders. Flowering period is end of April through May. Flower height is 15 to 18 inches, and foliage height is 10 inches.



◀ Delosperma Jewel of Desert (Concept Plants). These new delospermas flower from May until the beginning of winter as long as the sun shines. They are suitable for all container sizes; they look especially nice when three cuttings are added to one pot to make a mixed combination. Other uses include rock gardens, patio plants, roof gardens, living walls and perennial borders.

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▲ **Gentiana 'Rocky Diamond Blue Heart' (Dalina Genetics).**

Dalina Genetics has been working on breeding and selection in gentiana for many years now. In 2010, the company registered its trademark Rocky Diamond, and this exciting new plant is now available to dedicated growers. It is not an easy crop to grow, but when done right Blue Heart is absolutely beautiful.



▲ **Pericallis Baby Senetti (Suntory Collection).**

This new series offers advantages for mass market growers and retailers. These compact plants are ideal for high-density production and shipping. They are able to finish in smaller containers and boast early season color. Plant habit is upright and bushy, and they exhibit excellent branching.



▲ **Lobularia 'Lavender Stream' (Danziger).**

With the growing popularity of lobularias, it is no surprise breeders are expanding their offering of this crop. This fast-growing lobularia is a floriferous, ball-shaped plant. Heat tolerant, it grows all through summer and its color does not fade. It is ideal as a



filler in mixed containers, hanging baskets or window boxes.

◀ **Monarda 'Cranberry Lace' (Future Plants).** This new variety features purple-link flowers on a very compact plant. It flowers from July to September

and is hardy to Zone 4. It prefers sun or partial shade. This attractive perennial flowers in its first year and is notably resistant to mildew.

continued on page 34 ▶



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▲ **Petunia Crazytunia (Westflowers).** Crazytunias are a collection of unique petunias with exciting colors and patterns. They are very grower and consumer friendly. One of the more popular Crazytunias, Cherry Cheesecake (pictured) has gotten very positive feedback at garden trials due to its intense red and white candy cane star pattern.



▲ **Gaura 'Rosy Jane' (Rijnbeek & Son).** This gaura has beautiful bicolored flowers. The plant is

very stable and grows to 30 inches. It is suitable as a border or patio plant. 'Rosy Jane' flowers from June until September and prefers sun to partial shade.



▲ **Sedum 'Sunsparkler Blue Pearl' (Garden Solutions).** This exciting new sedum begins in spring with the bluest foliage of any upright sedum currently on the market. Fade-proof and disease-free leaves continue to intensify in color as it moves into hot and humid weather. Late summer brings loads of dark-pink flowers held above the foliage on strong stems.

▶ **Dahlia 'Mystic Fantasy' (Plant Haven).** A new addition to the Mystic series, 'Mystic Fantasy' boasts vibrant pink and yellow coloration against dark mahogany-black foliage. Mystic dahlias are now in their eighth generation of breeding, and many

more unique and interesting color combinations are being introduced. [8]

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**For more information about Floreexpo and the company's programs and varieties, please visit [www.floreexpo.net](http://www.floreexpo.net).**



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