

Passion for IMPROVING SUPPLY

As Danziger's Guatemala facility expands, a focus on growing protocols helps provide growers with the highest-quality plant material.

BY KATHLEEN HENNESSY

Growing extraordinary flowers starts with the highest-quality plant material. Back in 2013, when Danziger first established its growing facility in Nueva-Santa Rosa, Guatemala, the company had one goal in mind: Provide the North American market with the highest-quality plant material, not only for Danziger genetics, but for other top breeders and growers as well.

The original farm featured nearly 9 acres of greenhouses and was located next to a pepper farm. “I like to tell our customers that I found the last flat piece of land in Guatemala,” says Mike Fernandez, market manager at Danziger. “Back then, every change in the market told us we needed to build our own farm, and we needed to build one closer to the North American Market.”

RAPID EXPANSION

From the moment it was acquired, Danziger Guatemala has been expanding and is now more than four times its original size. The facility produces millions of cuttings every year, reaching more than 1,000 partners and customers throughout North America.

In 2021, market changes are driving even more growth. Danziger is expanding its Guatemala facility to meet industry needs, doubling its future production capacities to meet the demand for its genetics, and supporting other top breeding companies in the North American market. The company's Guatemala farm produces material for nearly a dozen other breeders and growers. It is a prime example of how people, partnerships and passion for quality drive superior growing standards.

“When the pepper farm adjacent to our property went up for sale, we saw it as an opportunity to grow our partnerships as well as our own genetics,” says Fernandez. The recent acquisition brings the total growing space to a combined 37 acres of greenhouses, on an overall area of 64.2 acres.

A DIVERSIFIED EFFORT

Danziger is focusing the expansion of the Guatemala facility on collaborative projects such as its partnerships with Rinehart Poinsettias and ThinkPlants — with Terra Nova Nurseries and Syngenta Flowers. Increased interest in Danziger genetics is also driving growth. The farm is a key component of the company's calibrachoa and petunia development. Danziger Guatemala is poised to deliver future varieties for customers as well. “The timing is right to enter new areas of the business, including foliage plants,” adds Fernandez. “We are looking into ways we can stabilize and clean up genetics for the North American market. This would be a big benefit to our whole industry.”

A FOCUS ON TECHNOLOGY

The need to provide the highest-quality plant material paired with superior customer service drove the company to create a state-of-the-art, technology-driven growing facility. Designed in Israel, the closed-roof greenhouses are made of polyethylene. Top-quality irrigation systems and automation equipment are in place. The facility also uses custom software, developed by Danziger, to help optimize growing conditions for each crop. They have also created a top-notch availability system. Because of the company's innovative breeding, technology and strict sanitation protocols, Danziger Guatemala is now recognized as an award-winning facility. At the 2020 International Grower of the Year Awards held during IPM Essen, Danziger received a Bronze award in the Young Plants category, with special recognition paid to their high standards of phytosanitary conditions and customer-driven production.

Research, human ingenuity and technology are defining a new set of best practices at the facility. A custom software program and state-of-the-art information systems help determine optimum growing conditions for each type of plant and crop. The program's parameters are defined by years of



trial research, defining what the mother stock needs.

The information it provides defines Danziger's advanced planting techniques, pairing plants together that require similar nutrients, PGRs, water and other growing needs. The irrigation system is all computer driven. Changes can be made to specialize the irrigation and fertilization in every crop, even down to specific benches in the greenhouse.

"What makes Danziger Guatemala different is the technology that was brought in from Israel," says Fernandez. "It is a very unique system. Every step in the process is detailed."

"Our technology and innovative growing procedures help ensure the highest-quality outcome," says Omri Cohen, manager, Danziger Guatemala. "Each quality control step is defined by protocols that are backed by research. We are able to give the plants exactly what they need, when they need it, ultimately producing better quality cuttings. For example, our superior mother stock is grown with lower chemical use. This offers many benefits, including allowing our cuttings to survive much longer in transit."

SERIOUS ABOUT SANITATION

Tight protocols and extremely strict sanitation regulations are followed to the letter. These practices made dealing with the unpredictable challenges of 2020 quick and efficient. "Dealing with COVID-19 called for an agile response," says Cohen. "Thanks to our already high sanitation regulations and protocols, minimal changes were required to deal with the pandemic."

"Research and development are also defining best practices for harvesting and culturing," adds Cohen. "Our Guatemala team works to harvest under optimal light conditions that have been proven by trials." Timing is also monitored, to protect the first cutting disconnected from the mother stock.

Most crops are harvested in under 15 minutes. The result is higher quality, longer-lasting cuttings.

In addition to producing high-quality Danziger genetics, the Guatemala facility also works to ensure open variety genetics are clean. "We take the extra steps needed to ensure the highest-quality plants are brought to market. That means every plant that comes out of our facility," says Cohen. "It is the right thing to do for our industry."

The site produces a variety of both annual and perennial plant varieties and has gained profound expertise in producing different product types suited to our customers evolving needs, including cuttings, callus cuttings, auto stick and mini cuttings for specific crops, such as mini poinsettia cuttings. Danziger also partners with other companies to produce their genetics at the Guatemala facility, providing unrooted cuttings to the North American market.

SHIPPING WITH EASE

When it is time to ship the plant material, technology and a customer-first focus drive the process. Increased quality control benchmarks and features such as last-minute ordering and standby options offer more flexibility for customers. Order turnaround time is unrivaled in the industry, with 24/7 service that keeps customers on track. For growers, this personalized service can be a big time saver, especially at peak weeks. "Customer service is part of our DNA," says Gaby Danziger, CEO. "Our team is truly committed to our customers' success, so we set out to stabilize the supply and solve problems for growers. Their drive to steadily produce a stable flow of plant material paired is a shining example of how we're working to create better plants, not only for Danziger, but for our industry as a whole."

When asked what makes Danziger Guatemala an asset to the industry, Fernandez may have put it best. "We are always putting our customers first," he says. "When I first started with this company, I told the leadership team I would be working for the customer to do business with Danziger, not the other way around. The team in Guatemala has that same focus. They always put the customer first." *gpn*

Kathleen Hennessy is chief marketing officer with Axiom Marketing Communications. She can be reached at khennessy@axiomcom.com.