

Bob's Market & Greenhouses Mason, WV Case Study



Part of the growing team at Bob's Market & Greenhouses.
(from left to right: Rick Barnitz, Dana Barnitz, Bobby Barnitz, Shaya Russell, and Ashley Riffle)

Family Business Dials In Production of Ferns & Mums with HydraFiber® and Florikan®

For more than 50 years, Bob's Market & Greenhouses has been a fixture on the banks of the Ohio river, sitting right on the western edge of West Virginia in the town of Mason. Founded by Bob Barnitz and his wife Corena, the family business has been around for three generations since its start as a produce grower with a local retail store in Mason. Since that time, the operation has expanded to include 25 acres of greenhouses under roof and five more acres of outside growing space, resulting in at least 700,000 finished plants per year. Bob's Market & Greenhouses has also become one of the ten largest wholesale seedling producers in the United States.

In 2019, the team at Bob's Market began working with the Profile Growing Solutions team to trial HydraFiber® engineered substrate. HydraFiber is a premier growing media component that is engineered from renewable wood fiber and designed to increase air porosity and water availability to crops. The substrate proved to be an important solution for Bob's Market to replace its perlite supply and to blend with peat moss at a rate of 30 – 35% inclusion depending on the crop.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- Bob's Market started adopting HydraFiber in its mixes back in 2019.
- The engineered substrate has helped to improve consistency and performance across a variety of crops.
- Incorporation of Controlled Release Fertilizers (CRF) into fern and mum production has led to better control over the nutrition program, with greatly reduced labor.

"We are always trying to figure out how to take something good and make it great. We have the opportunity to do that with a controlled-release fertilizer."

-Dana Barnitz



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EFFICIENCY IS KEY

The team saw significant cost savings with HydraFiber due to the highly compressed fibers, providing more efficient shipping and storage. Moreover the grower team recognized the benefits of irrigating less frequently, and having more forgiveness in situations where plants were inadvertently over-watered or underwatered.

By 2021 Bob's Market had committed to using HydraFiber in most crops, including ferns, mums, poinsettias, and hanging baskets. Following Profile's acquisition of Florikan in 2021, they began discussions with the Profile team on ways to improve their nutrition program as well. Those discussions led to the incorporation of Florikan® controlled-release fertilizers (CRF) in fern production, beginning in 2022.

Once again, the results were notable in crop performance, but perhaps even more importantly there were significant operational improvements for the growing team at Bob's Market.

"Using a controlled-release fertilizer means less tank mixing of liquid feed," noted Ashley Riffle. "It frees us up to focus on other things and takes away so much of the pressure." She explained that the Florikan Gal-Xe One products provide predictability, and extended growth not just in the greenhouse, but for the consumer as well.

Riffle has been with the organization since 2011, and has spent the past four years as a grower. "Our mums are just at another level this year," she said. "Crops recover better, are easier to manage, and the CRF takes so much of the guesswork out of growing".



Ashley Riffle displays a mum grown in a combination of HydraFiber and Florikan CRF.



Profile representative Gladys Opiyo shows off the root mass of a Poinsettia growing in a HydraFiber blend

"We hardly fed our mums this season and the mums stayed green," noted Shaya Russell, who has spent the past five years as a grower for Bob's Market. "With the high temperatures this summer, we used more water with less supplemental liquid feed, and we did not see any yellowing."

Gal-Xe One 17-5-11 (180 day) was originally used in the fern trials, and has since been incorporated into Riffle's and Russell's mum production at a rate of 5lbs per yard. The team is just starting to experiment with the use of CRF in hanging baskets for the coming spring.

"We are always trying to figure out how to take something good and make it great," explained Dana Barnitz. "We have the opportunity to do that with the time release fertilizer."

While Bob's Market & Greenhouses employs more than 100 full-time employees and 100 seasonal workers, labor constraints in the industry continue to present challenges.

"Growers have to continue to find ways to do things more efficiently, and to automate more processes because it's so hard to find labor," Barnitz said. "HydraFiber and Gal-Xe One help so much because we're checking pH and EC a lot less often, we're able to get plants to re-hydrate if an irrigation cycle is missed....this all helps so much when you have limited hours in the day."

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