

SYNGENTA FLOWERS INC.

Farm ramps up its flower power

International firm acquired Yoder Brothers Alva operation in 2008 and increased sales, cut costs.

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Ivana Gonzalez didn't know how much work went into the flowers she bought her mom on Mother's Day until she toured Syngenta Flowers Inc. in Alva on Wednesday.

The sophomore at LaBelle High School was one of about 50 students, teachers and business people who rode on trams throughout the flower farm to learn about the mass production of chrysanthemums and asters from seedlings to cuttings. The Southwest Regional Manufacturers Association hosted the event to raise awareness about the grower, which sells more than 140 million cuttings in 250 varieties of the brightly colored flowering plants throughout North America each year — just through its Alva operation.

"It's kind of crazy that they distribute to so many towns and so

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many states or across the country," Gonzalez said.

The Labelle High School faculty and students attended in an effort to kick-start the "Dream It. Do It" program modeled after the National Association of Manufacturers' program to inspire high school students to learn more about manufacturing.

The local Syngenta operation is a small part of the international company's flower production division, but has a big im-

pact on the local economy.

It employs 60 full-time staff and can have as many as 400 employees during peak season, which runs from April to mid-July, said Marlon Carrera, the manager who oversees operations for the Alva division.

Since the company acquired the farm from the Yoder Brothers in 2008, it has ramped up sales from 126.5 million cuttings in 2009 to being on track to sell roughly 143 million cuttings in 2012, he said.

At the same time, the company has reduced its operational costs from \$11 million a year to \$8.5 million a year, Carrera said.

Part of its success has to do with transforming from a family-owned business to the mind-set of a corporation.

"The first thing is following different steps to keep the sense of urgency all the time, of course build momentum and keep momentum — that's very important," he said.

He also empowers employees and gives managers room to make decisions and take risks within their own departments to increase efficiency and maintain quality of their plant products.

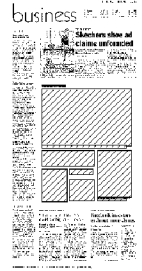
From the quality assurance checks in the field to the organization system in the cooler, the Syngenta operation hums at a fast pace that relies heavily on careful coordination.

That's what impressed Jeremy Fioravanti, vice president of relationship management for SunTrust Bank. He attended the tour to learn more about Syngenta's manufacturing operation and to network with others in the business community.

"There's a lot of science that goes into the production, as they mentioned they're not just dirt farmers," he said.

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Video: Watch a portion of a Syngenta tour.



SYNGENTA

- » **Based:** Basel, Switzerland; U.S. Headquarters: Wilmington, Del.
- » **Operations:** Locations in more than 90 countries.
- » **Employees:** Roughly 26,000.
- » **Sales:** For 2011, the company grossed \$13.3 billion.



Mark Manacle describes pot mums planting, irrigation and pest control to a tour group Wednesday. LINDSAY TERRY/THE NEWS-PRESS



Rows of pot and garden mums at Syngenta Flowers in Alva. LINDSAY TERRY/THE NEWS-PRESS