

Grow-How announces New Developments

The most significant factor affecting yields in the Dutch greenhouse horticulture industry is

growing media. In this newsletter we would like to tell you about the newest developments in this area.

Grow-How will be published a couple of times per year. ■

After the Tsunami...

Think back to the Tsunami of December 2004. Van der Knaap immediately launched a relief action for Sri Lanka. This regional action was embraced by contributors throughout the country. Now, 3 years later, more than 250,000 has been raised. With these funds, more than 55 houses and a boarding school for 200 boys have been built. All construction projects were co-ordinated by Dinesh Fernando, managing director of the Van der Knaap production companies in Sri Lanka. The many hundreds of people who were helped through this effort, are all very grateful to everyone who contributed money.



'De Kas' Innovation Centre for Greenhouse Horticulture

At the end of last year, Van der Knaap opened the doors of the De Kas innovation centre in Honselersdijk. De Kas houses three activities: a high-quality test greenhouse which makes it possible to make a precise com-



parison between different growing media under absolutely equal conditions. In addition to the test greenhouse, a laboratory has also been set up. Here raw materials and products are researched for their physical and chemical properties. Finally, an attractive conference room was set up where growers and growers' associations can be received. There, in an easy-going traditional Dutch atmosphere, ideas and opinions can be exchanged. De Kas can easily accommodate groups of up to 70 people. Are you looking for a place to discuss technical matters in horticulture with fellow growers? Please contact our office: +31 (0)174 296606.

Van der Knaap starts Potting Soil Company in Turkey

After a long period of preparation, Van der Knaap will soon open a potting soil company in Turkey. Because of the continual growth in exports to Turkey, the establishment of a potting soil company there was a logical next step. The

peat is obtained directly from peat pits of Van der Knaap in the Baltic States. The plant, which is also active in processing potting soil, will serve the entire southern European market. ■

Interview with Ron van der Knaap, General Manager of the Van der Knaap group of companies

“Service and helping the customer to think through things have made the difference for us for more than 25 years.”

Ron van der Knaap (age 46) and Perry van der Knaap (age 40) built up a large group of companies from nothing in the span of 25 years. All activities are directly or indirectly focused on the production of natural growing media.

Although in the 1990s production and sales primarily took place in the Netherlands, international activities have gradually occupied an important position. Exports are now sold to many horticultural areas in the world: from Russia to Japan and from Mexico to Australia. To continue to meet increasing foreign demand, new production centres will be built in the coming years at a number of locations abroad..

You are active in many areas in professional horticulture. But what is actually your core business?

“We strive to offer the professional horticulture industry the best solutions to meet requirements in the realm of natural growing media – on the basis of peat and coconut coir. Organic growing media should also have little impact on the environment. And that has become very important. Do a Google search on the words ‘horticulture’ and ‘sustainability’. It will bring up all these reports and studies that in the near future will be translated into official environmental policy. We are

staying ahead of this projected policy.”

For more than twenty-five years you have been actively developing new activities. Where does the drive come from?

“As a business, you have to strive continually to supply the best products you are able to supply. Only then will you be able to gain the trust of the market, step by step. Every initiative we have developed through the years has been directly or indirectly related to the improvement of our products. We were motivated by pure necessity. I’ll give you several examples: before 1994 our core business was the ‘processing of potting soil’ such as making plugs and pressed pots. We purchased the potting soil. To gain greater control over the quality of the potting soil we use, we acquired Holland Potgrond in 1994. After we transformed Holland Potgrond into a well-organised company, we started to think about how we could further improve our products. To achieve our goal, we had to gain a better understanding concerning

the quality of the raw materials. Towards this end, we started companies in the Baltic States for peat and in Sri Lanka for coir. In this way, we brought the path to the source material in house step by step. We have also expanded the product range for growers through the years through acquisitions and our own new products. Now we have a group of specialised companies that have the complete chains for peat and coir in their own hands. This enables them to control quality. And this enables us to provide high-quality solutions in any area to our customers.”

So the group is now complete?

“Through the years we have worked not only on quality, but also on the product range. For every crop and every phase of cultivation, we have the optimal solution in house. Natural solutions that can be understood. From the smallest plug for cuttings, to complete cultivation systems. For ornamental plants and for the cultivation of vegetables. We also have an enthusiastic team



Ron van der Knaap (left) and Perry van der Knaap

of people who approach the task of helping our customers to think things through as a challenge. Our ambition for the coming years is to significantly improve the yield for numerous crops in collaboration with growers. Working with our customers and providing service – that’s what it’s all about.”

Is this also related to your innovation centre ‘De Kas’?

“Yes indeed. As we have said, we want to anticipate the wishes of growers better. To achieve this, we opened ‘De Kas’ in Honselersdijk at the end of 2006. It provides a testing centre, laboratory and a conference centre under one roof. At the centre, we work and converse continually with a range of business relations from inside and outside the Netherlands. This interaction bears new ideas, often through testing and combining the ideas. Apart from the service we

provide through our production companies, our added value can be found in knowledge. Or better put, in our ‘grow-how’. We would like to share this knowledge with both current customers and potential new customers.”

How is Van der Knaap involved with coir?

“Some 12 years ago, we saw a good future for coir as a growing medium. This is why we set up our own production centres in Sri Lanka. It is very important that, after 10 years of research, we were able to produce high-quality coir in every desired texture. The coarse versions in particular work very well in growing substrates. Thanks to the good cultivation results that growers have been able to achieve using our coir, the demand for it is continually increasing. To be able to continue to meet this demand in the future, we are looking around

for new production centres, such as in the Dominican Republic.”

Finally: what role do you think Dutch horticulture will play in this?

“The Netherlands is a typical horticultural country. To remain successful, it is vitally important to continue innovating. This pertains not only to producing as much as possible, but also to anticipating both current and new demands in the marketplace. The market, for example, is demanding ever better quality. An important quality aspect is the environment. Many people are concerned about nature and wildlife. A growing part of the market is therefore demanding products that have been produced in an environmentally friendly manner. By anticipating this demand early on, Dutch growers can gain an advantage.”

“Currently more than 5 million coco slabs per year”

In 2000, Van der Knaap introduced the Forteco growbag. It is also called “coco slab” in the horticulture industry. In Canada, the USA, Mexico, Spain, Italy, Turkey, Japan, Korea, Russia and many other countries in the world, the coco slab is now a common used growing medium.

“We got the idea of compressing coir to produce growbags in 1997. Although the many benefits of high-quality coir substrates have not been recognized on a large scale, growers in Canada are convinced: coir slabs are just the growing medium they were looking for” says Jan De Smet, the man from Belgium who in 1997 was

involved in the birth of the “coco slab” and in Canada is known as “Mr. Forteco”. At the Hortifair in 1998, he met Ron van der Knaap. Within a couple of days their common mission was born: “we will develop coir substrates that have an extreme generative growth beyond any other coir substrate”.



Jan de Smet Managing Director Forteco bv

TEN YEARS OF RESEARCH

Now, ten years later, a modern factory has been built in Sri Lanka that has machines developed under its own management and well-trained personnel. The plant actually consists of two sections. A section where fresh first-class coconut husk is processed into buffered homogenous batches in various textures (fractions). And another section of the plant where the coconut fractions are processed into compressed grow bags of every desired density. Most of the grow bags are produced with pre-cut plant holes and drain slits.

THE ROLLS ROYCE OF SUBSTRATES

Coir can be used by the professional horticulture industry if it has been optimally processed. Van der Knaap controls the entire production process for producing high-quality, homogenous substrates better than anyone. Growers abroad, in particular, consider Forteco to be the Rolls Royce of coco substrates. 

Information sessions:
“What extra coco substrates may bring me?”

During these sessions, the technical aspect of cultivating plants on coir substrate is discussed. A range of greenhouses that grow vegetables on coir will be visited. Interested? Please contact our office: +31 (0)174 296606. You may also call Jan de Smet on his cell phone +31-6-10895664.

Experiences in the Field

Arthur (l.) and Wim Zwinkels, Honselersdijk

"We grow yellow bell peppers (variety Derby) on 1.6 hectares. After conducting the necessary



tests, we choose for Forteco Power. Managing your irrigation is much less critical with coir. Although the plants grow more vegetative, our total production is considerably higher. And the recycling costs are substantially lower. What more could you ask for ..."

Ariën Hartman, Sexbierum

"I grow bell peppers on 9 hectares and I use perlite as growing medium. I am always



open for novelties. That's why I am actually testing the Forteco Maximum. The trial goes very well so far. Production is actually higher compared to perlite. Because the substrate is easy to manage, I am also very hopeful about the performance for the rest of the season."

Dick Oosthoek, Bergschenhoek

"I have grown bell peppers for 17 years. For the last 6 years I've been growing on



Forteco Profit. Growing on coir is ideal!. Because I also compare with rockwool, I have seen that the crop performs better on coir. But more important, the quality of the peppers is better."

Jan Baremans, Honselersdijk

"I have grown tomatoes for 30 years. The last 20 years I've been growing cherry toma-



atoes. I'm growing my whole range - 2.8 hectares - on Forteco Profit now. The quality is excellent, the yield is even a little bit higher compared to rockwool. Installing the substrate is easy and the recycling costs are much lower. Coir is also better for the environment."

Forteco Growbags

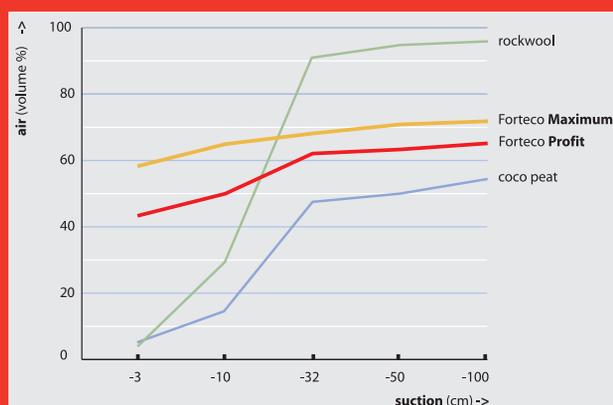
Technical data

Because of the unique method of processing thick coconut husks into homogenous coco slabs, Forteco is a high quality coir growing medium. Coir reacts differently compared to other common used substrates, but in the end it brings more growth. The steerability of the Forteco grow bags is remarkable. Growers that are using Forteco coco slabs see the following benefits:

- very reliable
- easy to install
- technical support
- better steerability
- better fruit quality
- higher production
- less environmental impact.

Forteco coco slabs are available in different grades :

- Forteco Profit: ideal for greenhouse vegetables.
- Forteco Power: specially developed for growing roses.
- Forteco Maximum: this new substrate has an extremely high air capacity. This results in an even higher degree of generative growth.



The Forteco Profit and Forteco Maximum grow bags have a high air content at saturation resulting in a perfect root system. Profit and Maximum also retain sufficient moisture under conditions of high matric water potential (dry conditions) making the dry slabs to reabsorb water without any problem.

Thanks to the extreme air content, Forteco Maximum results in an extreme generative growth of the plants.

Product Overview

Van der Knaap has divided its companies that are directly aimed at serving growers into 3 sectors.

1. Rooting Media

For every crop we have sophisticated products in house to enable cuttings to develop into vital plants. Each product can be entirely tailored to your wishes with respect to composition, dimensions, holes, etc.

PAPER POTS

The rooting medium with a paper shell. Ideal for all types of cuttings and seedlings. Very environmentally friendly. With fully automatic production lines, any potting soil mixture desired can be transferred quickly to paper pots with extremely loose filling.



- delivered ready-to-use in trays
- available in various diameters in every height

FIBRE NETH® PLUGS

Shell-free plugs of fine coir mixtures. The coir provides an ideal distribution of water, allowing plants to develop quickly.

- available in every form and size
- retains shape, so is excellent for automatic processing
- plug-in-plug concepts possible



- because of the rinsing process, the pH and EC values can be controlled precisely

GLUE PLUGS

Rooting medium without a shell. The potting soil is kept together by an organic, biodegradable binding agent. Excellent for rooting geraniums, potted plants and bedding plant cuttings.



PRESSED POTS

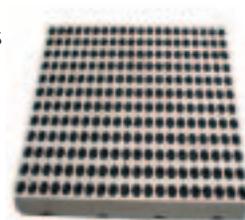
The rooting medium for chrysanthemums (also extending growth period). - standard size of sliding container / pot size as desired

- easy to process
- we deliver and pick up sliding containers
- also suitable for geraniums, carnation and aster cuttings, larger sizes of bedding plants and warm and cold weather vegetable plants



FILLED POTS, CONTAINERS, SETS AND TRAYS

- filled pots for trees, roses, potted plants and gerberas
- filled sets for all types of bedding plants
- filled containers for growing carnations and roses
- filled trays (with or without pots) for potted plants and tree nursery products



2. Growing Media

Every crop requires a specific soil type. With our expertise and high-quality peat and coir fractions, we can meet every requirement.

MIXTURES BASED ON HP COIR AND PEAT

In close consultation with our customers, we compose our potting soil mixtures from peat, HP-coir or a combination of the two. Once growers gain experience with HP-coir, they are very enthusiastic



about the medium. It is the highest quality coir available in every desired texture: from extra fine to super course. Every shipment is

also steamed in the Netherlands. Because of its special moisture characteristics, HP-coir is increasingly a constituent part of the mixtures ordered. Each order can be delivered in bulk, big bags, super bags, big bales, crates and in sacks.

SUBSTRATES

For a number of crops, Van der Knaap has developed sophisticated substrates in collaboration with growers for cut flowers, orchids, potted plants, vegetables that are botanically



considered fruit, tree nurseries and small fruit.

FORTECO GROW BAGS

Under the name Forteco, Van der Knaap supplies compressed coir mats that expand - once they have been delivered and watered. Our unique buffering process, in combination with the pre-drilled plant and drain holes, ensure that the mats are ready for immediate use. 



3. Service

In the horticulture business, an incredible amount of work regularly has to be done in a relatively short span of time. Through a range of service units, Van der Knaap can take specialised work off your hands. Motivated people and efficient equipment are a guarantee for high quality.

PRESSING POTS ON SITE

Ideal for bedding plants, tomatoes, bell peppers, etc. Sowing immediately after the pots have been pressed is an excellent way to start violets, lettuce, endive and asparagus.



FILLING POTS AND POTTING ON SITE

Portable equipment and skilled employees make it possible on site for any number of pots to be filled.

CLEANING AND STERILISING CONTAINERS AND TRAYS

With our automated washing machine we can clean and sterilise all your containers and trays quickly and proficiently.



RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

In 'De Kas' we have the testing capacity to test any type of medium precisely. We are also willing to assist you in the search for innovative solutions for greater yields. 



Unique Coir Plug

Van der Knaap has obtained the international sales rights for a unique coir plug. Following a year of intensive collaboration between Van der Knaap and the Danish company Ellegaard, a unique joint venture was launched on 6 September 2007.

With washed coir grit from Van der Knaap, Ellegaard Denmark produces unique cutting and sowing plugs. Because of its extremely compact form, the plug can be transported the world over at a minimal cost. Once on site, the plug expands - once water is administered - to reach the preferred height of approximately 4 cm.

The coir grit is produced by Van der Knaap, the plugs are produced by Ellegaard and marketing/sales are handled by Van der Knaap.

The plug is a perfect addition to the Forteco product range and will be offered primarily on the international market under the name Forteco plug by Van der Knaap exclusively.

The plugs can be supplied in the following diameters: \varnothing 27 mm, 36 mm, 42 mm and 70 mm. All sizes are available in versions for sowing and cuttings.



• from left to right: Lars Steen Pederson, Director of Ellegaard Denmark, Henri Mast, Director of Ellegaard Nederland BV, Dick Verweij, Export Manager at Van der Knaap, Ron van der Knaap, General Manager of Van der Knaap.

Welcome to 'De Kas'

Van der Knaap recently opened its own innovation centre: De Kas in Honselersdijk. De Kas has a comfortable atmosphere where fellow greenhouse horticulture professionals can exchange information on plant rooting and growth and indulge the free flow of ideas. In De Kas meetings are held for existing business relations and growers associations.

GROWERS ASSOCIATIONS ARE WARMLY WELCOME

Would you like to meet with your association in an inspiring environment? De Kas is an ideal location for it. We can provide the catering and can offer you the most modern presentation technology.

PUT IT TO THE TEST

Want to conduct tests under exactly equivalent conditions? You have come to the right place at De Kas.

TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

Are you looking for a creative solution for a greater yield? It would be well worth the time and effort to pay a visit to De Kas. With our extensive knowledge of plant rooting and growth, we will help you think things through.

APPOINTMENT?

Would you like to visit De Kas? Make an appointment as soon as possible: +31 (0)174 296606.

