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New factory coco slabs in India nearly completed

More and more agricultural businesses experience the possibilities of Forteco coco slabs. Also the realization among Dutch vegetable growers that there is an environmentally friendly alternative for the commonly used stone wool slabs is beginning to sink in. To be able meet the ever increasing demand for the Forteco coco slabs, a new factory is being built in the South of India.

Growrite Substrates (India) Pvt. Ltd will be an almost exact copy of the factory in Sri Lanka. The construction of the new factory started in autumn 2009 with the levelling and site preparation of 13 hectares of land. The plant includes:

- A production hall of 1,200 m² (see photo) for cutting and processing of the coconut husk
- A concrete drying floor of 33,000 m² for drying the cut coconut material;
- A production hall of 4,800 m² for production and packaging of the coco slabs;
- An office, dressing rooms, cafeteria and maintenance building.

The factory will eventually have a production capacity of 4,000 tons of coco material, the equivalent of



Building of the factory in India

around 3,5 million coco slabs. Around 250 people will work at this factory. The first coconuts are scheduled to be cut by May and the first slabs will be pressed around July of this year.

Ravi Bala exclusive producer for Van der Knaap Group

The Ravi Bala factory, located near Madurai in Southern India, is specialized in the production of treated coco peat from coir with a production capacity of approximately 3,000 tonnes. As of January 1, 2010, this factory was taken over by a partner of the Van der Knaap Group. Therefore, Ravi Bala has now become an exclusive producer for the Van der Knaap Group for treated and /or washed material from coir. By using these production facilities, we can exercise more control over the quality of the products. ■

NEW FACES

Recently, two new account managers have joined the Van der Knaap Group. Kees van der Arend has been with Van der Knaap since 1 February. He will focus mainly on the Gerbera market. Thomas Loy started work 1 March, and will concentrate on the area of North Rhine Westphalia, which is close to the office of Holland Potgrond Limburg. ■



Kees van der Arend



Thomas Loy

Product development:

Extended propagation of tomatoes in Forteco Growpot

This season, Forteco is taking part in a test of 'extended propagation' at the Improvement Centre in Bleiswijk, The Netherlands. Our partners in this test are primarily plant propagator Van Geest and GreenQ. For this test, Forteco has specially designed a 'Growpot' (see box) that serves both as a propagation medium and a cultivation medium for the entire season. A similar experiment with the Growpot is being conducted at the nursery of Mularski in Poland.

This test on the extended propagation of tomato plants has several objectives. First, we wanted to test the technical feasibility of the extended propagation. In addition, we are also looking at the practicality of planting larger plants in between the other crops (interplanting). Finally, we wanted to see how the production gap between two overlapping cultivations can be reduced by propagating on the Forteco Growpot.

At the end of 2009, the tomato plants, type Komeet, were sown in propagation plugs at plant propagator Van Geest. Subsequently, the plugs were transplanted directly into a Growpot. As a reference, several plugs were transplanted into a stone wool block. The reference plants in stone wool blocks were planted on Forteco Profit coco slabs on December 27, 2009 at the Improvement Centre. The plants on the



Tomato plants on Growpots at Improvement Centre

Growpots were transported to the Improvement Centre one month later (see photo). At that time, the first cluster was in full bloom and the first fruits were set.

So far, we have determined that propagation in the Growpot allows

early production. This has to do with the fact that the plants can be put away more generative in the Growpot. They are also exposed to light a little longer. The transportation of such large plants at the nursery does not pose a problem, although an adjusted transport system is needed. The planting of a large plant also has the advantage that the 'non-productive' period in the greenhouse becomes a lot shorter than usual.

In the coming period interplanting will take place and we will see how this is best dealt with practically. The plants for this trial have been sown at plant propagator Van Geest. 

THE DOUBLE BENEFIT OF THE FORTECO GROWPOT

The Forteco Growpot is a growbag of four, five or six litres that is designed to be used both as a propagation unit and a growing unit in the greenhouse. The Growpot allows to propagate larger plants and it brings immediate cost savings for the grower as this product has a double function (propagation cube and growbag in one). There is no need to propagate the plants on a propagation medium and then transplant them onto a growing medium. The plants are transplanted directly into the final substrate. This way, a longer propagation phase is possible which makes sure the grower can cultivate larger plants that go into production earlier.

Orchid Testing in 'De Kas' part two

In 2009, we started an Orchid Trial in our own research facility 'De Kas', to test an alternative substrate for orchids. Traditionally orchids are grown on different types of bark. Van der Knaap Group has set up this trial, because we are convinced that in the future there will not be an adequate supply of high quality bark.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

To this end, Van der Knaap Group has done research into an alternative substrate, whereby not only the chemical and physical characteristics of the substrate were taken into account, but also the availability of the raw materials of the alternative substrate was considered. An important condition for the alternative substrate is that it must be able to be used in the current cultivation system. The alternative substrate is therefore designed in such a way that it can be used directly next to the current substrate without problem (such as having to adjust water supply and/or fertilization).



In May 2009 the large trial has started, in which the two substrates were compared to each other. We have used two different kinds of Phaleanopsis, known as Pebble Beach and Silibama.

The orchids were put on tables, sorted by type, and per table the two substrates were tested. The cultivation consisted of a vegetative phase, in which water supply and fertilization were adjusted according to the plants that were growing on the substrate composed of bark. After this phase, the plants went into a chilling period for



around 8 weeks in which creation of the flower bud was initiated. After the chilling period the plants were cultivated further until they were in bloom. All orchids are currently in flower.

During the entire cultivation, no plants were lost. Both fertilization and water supply were adjusted to the substrate containing bark. The plants growing on the alternative substrate showed healthy roots



and the leaves had a good colour.

After the chilling period the flower stems of both types of orchids where counted and compared with one another. There was no statistical difference perceivable in the production of the number of flower stems between the orchids grown on the substrate containing bark and the alternative substrate. In percentages however, the alternative substrate showed a few more flower stems.

Currently, a new research is set up in which the emphasis will be on the dry matter of the different types of plant parts, such as roots en leaves, and the differences between rooting, number of flower buds per stem etc. We hope to inform you about this in a coming publication of Grow-How. ■

THE EARTHQUAKE IN HAÏTI

Our factory in the Dominican Republic, DR Grow Rite SA, is located on the same island as Haiti. On January 12, 2010 the factory was in business like every other day. At a quarter to six in the afternoon it appeared that this day was not like any other day. The staff suddenly felt like they were on a ship and most of them did not understand what was happening. Fortunately, some others understood immediately what was going on and everyone went outside. The people at the factory itself, which includes four Haitian employees, had not noticed because they work on top of a 20 cm thick concrete floor.

When everyone went home around six o'clock, it became obvious that something serious was going on. All the news was about an earthquake, but information about the epicentre was not available. However, there was an immediate tsunami warning because Nagua and the hinterland where the factory is located are slightly below sea level. At eleven

o'clock, the tsunami warning was withdrawn and the calm returned. For employees with family members in Haiti a difficult time began. There was still no information available and it was impossible to get in contact with anyone in Haiti.

The government made phone calls from the Dominican Republic to Haiti free of charge immediately, but nobody could be reached. Eventually, it lasted 14 days before there was any contact and it became clear that everyone was safe.

It turned out that the factory is located about 400 km from where the epicentre in Haiti was. A great fear of an aftershock remained. The factory is situated at a place where earthquakes occur frequently. The largest earthquake in written history was in 1946 in the province of Nagua, where also the factory is. It was 8.1 on the Richter scale and over a year, 100,000 after shocks were recorded. There was a tsunami then and an entire village was washed away. Especially older people have bad memories of the event. In February here was another shock to be felt at the factory, but, luckily, again without consequences. 



Would you like more information about topics in this newsletter?
Simply contact our Public Relations Department: tel. +31 (0)174 296606.

AGENDA 2010

PLANTARIUM

Wednesday 25 to

Saturday 28 August

In August the Van der Knaap Group will be present at Plantarium in Boskoop/ Hazerswoude Dorp, The Netherlands. Visit our stand for a cup of coffee and information about our extensive range of products.

WESTLAND TUINBOUW

RELATIEDAGEN

Wednesday 15 to

Thursday 16 September

This year, the Westland Tuinbouw Relatiedagen are organised for the very first time in De Lier, The Netherlands. As a company that has its origins in the Westland, naturally we can not miss this opportunity!

GARDEN BUSINESS

Tuesday 21 to

Thursday 23 September

The latest addition to the Van der Knaap Group, Van der Knaap Retail, will be present at the Garden Business trade fair in Gorinchem, The Netherlands. You are welcome to visit our stand and admire and experience our range of potting soil products for consumers!

HORTIFAIR

Tuesday 12 to

Friday 15 October

Like previous years, Van der Knaap Group will be present at this large international horticulture fair in the RAI Amsterdam, The Netherlands. For the third time in succession, the main focus of the Horti Fair is sustainability in horticulture, expressed in the theme: 'Earning sustainably'. In the framework of this theme we will present you our innovative, sustainable products, based on organic raw materials.

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