Propagating Innovation for 55 Years

As Oasis Grower Solutions celebrates its 55th Anniversary, grower-driven innovation remains the heart of all we do.

Innovation is more than a buzzword for us at Oasis Grower Solutions. When our division of Smithers-Oasis was established 55 years ago, innovation was already our driving force. As we look back on five and a half decades of helping growers grow, the thread of innovation binds it all.

When our first growing media was introduced to commercial greenhouse growers in 1969, it had been 15 years since V.L. Smithers changed the floral industry forever — thanks to a water-absorbent floral foam now known worldwide as OASIS® Floral Foam. That same spirit of invention and innovation drove the development of foam-based propagation substrates for growers.

When OASIS® O-903 Rooting Blocks launched in 1969, it represented a first-of-its-kind entry into the commercial substrate market. With stable pH, uniform growth and higher yields, it captured growers' attention. Fifty-five years later, our substrate innovations still do the same.

Real-World Solutions for Real Growers

One thing that sets us apart — aside from the next-generation technologies behind our latest substrates — is our focus on helping growers excel. Our innovations aren't driven by available technology, trendy marketing campaigns or our competitors. They're driven by the real-world needs of growers who depend on our products to build their businesses.

That was the case in the mid-1970s when a Smithers-Oasis employee named Charles (Charlie) Walton listened to his friend and customer Paul Ecke, Jr. of California's famed Ecke Ranch poinsettias. Ecke needed a high-performance, lightweight propagation media to ship Ecke poinsettia liners worldwide.

Charlie took on the challenge. The duo collaborated, a new foam formulation was developed, and OASIS® Rootcubes® was born. All because we listened and responded when a grower needed a solution to their problem.

OASIS® Rootcubes® led to the eventual development of OASIS® Wedge® — the preferred propagation media of the world's finest poinsettia breeders and propagators. Incidentally, Charlie became President of Smithers-Oasis from 1982 to 2006, when our current President and CEO Robin Gilbride took the helm.

Research-Driven Innovation & Development

Dr. Vijay Rapaka and Charlie Walton
at Cultivate'24

As Oasis Grower Solutions hit its teenage years in the mid-1980s, innovations and advances in our grower products continued. We built our first research greenhouse facility on the Smithers-Oasis campus in Kent, Ohio USA. With that, we could run our own in-house substrate trials and compile real-world results growers could trust.

Dr. Vijay Rapaka, our Director of Global Grower Operations and Research, joined the Oasis Grower Solutions team in 2008 as Senior Grower – Research Scientist, advancing to Corporate Grower Research Manager in 2009. Those early days conducting research laid the foundation for the innovative substrate technologies we're bringing to market now.

"Substrate research is one of the most complex and intriguing subjects — one through which we can most influence plant growth and performance," Dr. Rapaka says. "Here at Smithers-Oasis, we have an excellent team of polymer scientists and plant physiologists working on various aspects of plant growth, quality and performance. This is an area where we can never become complacent because there is always room to innovate for the plants to excel and express their full potential whether it is propagation or production."

Ten years ago, we built a new Research, Innovation & Development (RI&D) facility. Tour that facility and you'll find numerous trials underway. Some involve advancements or new options for existing products, like our OASIS® Fertiss® PlugTray, or our newly launched OASIS® RhizoPlug™ Tray singulated foam substrate.

You'll also find yet-to-be-released substrate formulations undergoing rigorous testing to ensure they deserve a spot in greenhouses like yours.

The Future of Substrates

As we look forward to Oasis Grower Solutions' next 55 years, we have more real-world innovations in store. Our clean, food-safe, pest- and pathogen-free substrate introductions are reshaping the substrate market. From our perspective, the future of substrates is clear.

2021 saw the launch of our Low Carbon Footprint OASIS® AeroMax™ PlugSheet, the first substrate in our OASIS® AeroFamily Substrates line. It was joined by OASIS® AeroSelect™ PlugSheet in early 2024, with more options in this rapidly expanding family coming soon.

Developed specifically in response to grower needs, like all our products, these OASIS® AeroFamily Substrates offer precision hydroponic growers unprecedented flexibility to meet climate- and crop-specific production demands.

Fall of 2023 introduced growers to our OASIS® RhizoPlug™ Sheet substrate. Thanks to our RI&D team, growers could be certain this substrate could significantly outperform its predecessor.

Just this month, July 2024, we launched OASIS® RhizoPlug™ Tray. Our first singulated plug substrate (but not our last), OASIS® RhizoPlug™ Tray excelled in our RI&D trials. Now it's doing the same for customers who dive into the future of substrates and Make the Switch to OASIS® RhizoPlug™ Tray.

As we celebrate 55 years of serving growers, we'd like to thank you for your confidence and trust. You can count on us to keep propagating innovation with you in mind. As our President Robin says, inventing products that solve problems for our customers is why we're here.

Let us help you grow. We're Oasis Grower Solutions. Here's to another 55 years!

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