

SeedWORLD VISITS



Sneak a peek inside DLF's new Seed Enhancement & Operations Facility in Albany, Oregon

By Madeleine Baerg, Director of Content

It seems in every conversation I've had lately about forage and turf seed, someone has mentioned one particular company and one particular build – DLF's new seed enhancement and operations facility in Albany, Oregon. And no wonder. At 141,000 square feet and two years in the planning, DLF's primary production and wholesale distribution site for North America has got people in the Willamette Valley – the grass seed capital of the world – and beyond talking. So, I decided to go check it out for myself. I ended up spending a whole day with the DLF team and if there's one word that sums up the feeling I got from them, it's jazzed. They're genuinely and authentically excited about what this new space will allow them to deliver to the forage and turf seed sector.

It's clear almost as soon as you step in the door that what makes this facility notable isn't measured in size or throughput, though it's big in both by forage and turf seed standards. What I heard consistently from the whole DLF team, from Brian Jaasko, DLF's SVP North American Supply Chain & Operations to Fabian Ruiz Gonzalez, the warehouse manager, is that this build is about more than consolidating DLF's Oregon operations into a single building, and more than building a bigger box to house higher capacity equipment. It's about creating a physical space that enables service. If you're as curious as I was to check out DLF's new seed enhancement facility, come on inside...

DLF'S NEW ALBANY, Oregon site officially opened this past August. Its biggest claim to fame is its state-of-the-art seed enhancement line, which produces 10,000 pounds of enhanced seed per hour. Fully automated and touch-screen controlled, the seed enhancement line allows ultra-precise application of inoculants, biologicals, biostimulants and seed protection recipes. ("We don't call it seed coating because it really is about more than that," Susanna Sieke, DLF North America's Director of Seed Enhancements, says. "We're setting seed up to thrive in ways that go beyond conventional seed treatments.")

Next to the seed enhancement line is a high-speed and fully automated blend-

ing and re-bagging line the DLF team calls T-Rex. T-Rex can seamlessly switch between blending and rebagging to continuously produce, package and palletize up to 44,000 pounds of seed – enough to fill a truckload – almost hourly.

"This facility versus where we were a year ago can put out about three times the capacity. That's important because our customers are very vulnerable to the weather in their businesses, so when they say they need seed, we've got to get it to them right now," Jaasko says.

The plant also features a quality control lab and a tag room, plus 85,000 square feet of storage for raw materials and finished goods (it truly feels like walking through the Costco warehouse of forage

and turf seeds). Along the facility's side wall, an on-site bank of offices allow the integration of the processing line with customer service, purchasing and management.

"We've got this incredible team that was spread out in different facilities now together under one roof, which allows us to really push forward on our goals," Jaasko says. "DLF is the global leader in turf and forage. We have to make it our responsibility to set the bar for innovation and operational excellence for the industry, since those directly impact our customers' success."

As the new DLF facility was coming to life, critical work happened offsite on another piece of their delivery puzzle: DLF's team of researchers developed a

unique new seed enhancement solution tailored to the pro turf and forage markets. Called 4Most Seed Enhancement by DLF™, the treatment integrates a targeted, slow-release nitrogen to provide long-term nutrition, a calcium carbonate protective coating that increases soil contact, a biodegradable super absorbent that delivers moisture to the seed, and several species of turf- and forage-specific microorganisms that support plant health and early root development.

"One of the things I'm most excited about from our investment here is rolling out our 4Most Seed Enhancement, which has a lot of components that can not only be beneficial to the plant, but beneficial to the soil long term," Sean Chaney, Vice President of DLF's Pro-Turf division, says. "4Most is a product that we and our customers can have supreme confidence in. It is designed to outperform both raw seed and our competitors' coated products, and it can be a game changer in both performance and product quality."

I asked Sieke how big a difference 4Most makes to the industry.

"It's huge," she says. "Especially in the turf and forage industry, there's nothing like it out there on the market today. 4Most Seed Enhancement is state-of-the-art. And it's just the start. As [breeding] science progresses, we'll be right there with it."

With nearly 10% of DLF's workforce focused on research and development, expect DLF to deliver additional turf and forage-targeted seed enhancement solutions.

"The reality is that breeding alone can't keep up with growers' changing needs, especially given increasingly extreme weather," Sieke adds. "That's why DLF invests so deeply into ongoing seed enhancement research both at our research station in Philomath, Oregon and in field trials at research sites across North America and beyond. I'm really proud that we're leading the way for seed innovation, and we're constantly looking for ways to better serve our customers."

One of the big emphases at the new facility is a focus on sustainability in its



operations. Where many companies talk about that, DLF has invested in technology with direct benefits. This plant is shifting how it receives seed from its seed suppliers from bagged seed to totes, which decreases the manual labor and the waste associated with seed arriving in 50 pound bags. The company is investing in research and rolling out products that prioritize biologicals and biostimulants to support the responsible use of conventional chemical plant protection products. And the plant's precision control allows the team to focus on quality assurance, maximizing the success of every seed, the efficiency of every input and the productivity of every acre.

While capacity, innovation, impressive technology and sustainability are key features of DLF's new facility, Jaasko says its biggest differentiator is something else entirely.

"We've got all these fancy new assets

here, but the assets I'm most proud of, hands down, are the people."

Take Polly, who leads grower payables and this year will celebrate 45 years with DLF and its predecessors. Or Ramon and Fabian, who each started on the warehouse floor and now lead DLF's South America sales and Albany warehouse team respectively. Or Marc, who started as a forklift driver and today leads DLF's packaging buying. DLF's commitment to its team underscores its long-term thinking about the industry as a whole, and is a key piece of delivering the type of service customers need.

"We've got a rockstar group of people who are honed in on our global values," Jaasko says. "The equipment's fantastic to have because it gets us from A to B really quickly, but at the end of the day, it's always going to be our staff, number one, and I think you can feel that in our hallways." **SW**