

Out of Business? Details on BFG, 80 Acres, Revol Greens; plus, the market after cyclosporiasis



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

BFG
80 Acres
Revol Greens
Small Growers—*NYT*
Hippo Harvest
Corteva Split

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BFG Details

If you haven't heard by now, BFG Supply appears to be in the process of winding down operations. After a conversation with my local horticultural supplier, this article serves less like an exposé and more of a PSA.

BFG has reportedly stopped taking new orders, and fulfilling existing ones now looks like a problem as well. The Expo events have been canceled. Nothing has been confirmed publicly by the company; what's circulating comes from customers and reps, but the effects are already reaching growers.

Worth remembering: BFG is a distributor, not a manufacturer. Everything you normally source through them is still being made and still being shipped. What's compromised is the path from the manufacturer to your greenhouse.

So if you get a call from a horticultural supplier you don't normally use or recognize, give them your time. My local rep is working both sides of this, they're a competitor of BFG and a customer of theirs, which means reworking their own supply acquisition while also going directly to manufacturers to fill orders BFG can no longer ship.

If you have an order in with BFG and you're still waiting on it, check in with your rep and the manufacturer, and confirm it's actually en route.

Fifty years of distribution doesn't come out of the supply chain quietly. The rest of the industry is scrambling to route around the gap. It may pay off to be proactive on checking orders for the next few weeks as this settles.



80 Acres Closing

I've had a couple of pieces of news land lately that my first reaction to was pure denial, and the closure of 80 Acres Farms is one of them. A year ago the Hamilton, Ohio vertical farm looked like a juggernaut, picking up three of Kalera's farms and its IP, acquiring the Israeli plant-genetics firm Plantae Biosciences, merging with Soli Organic and collecting local business awards along the way. I thought they might actually have the first large-scale vertical farming business model that worked. Instead, 80 Acres joins the list.

Worth being precise about what happened: this isn't a bankruptcy. The company says it couldn't secure the capital required to keep operating, and reporting ties the timing to an acquisition that fell apart at the last minute. The distinction matters, because the manner of the exit has been the most-discussed part of this whole thing.

Start with the good. As of the announcement, 80 Acres was still shipping product. This is a company that saw the end coming and accepted it, rather than a padlock on the door overnight the way Fifth Season went, or the long public grind of AeroFarms and Plenty downsizing and restructuring to keep a handful of farms lit. The initial industry reaction was warm and respectful. Without any inside knowledge, there appears to be a great deal of genuine regard for the people who ran this company.

Then the backlash. The company's line was that technology wasn't the issue, plant productivity had been excellent, but that economic conditions were the issue. That got pushback immediately: if there's a profitable market for lettuce and you went out of business selling lettuce, the technology was the issue. It grew plants beautifully. It also cost too much to build and too much to run.

I'd add the other half of it. The problem wasn't only that vertical farming was expensive to operate. It's that nobody would pay extra for the output. The pitch was local, pesticide-free, longer shelf life, available year-round. Consumers heard all of it and then reached for the cheaper clamshell.

Where do we go from here?

Enthusiasts keep invoking the trough of disillusionment, the Gartner hype cycle idea that a wave of early entrants floods a new market, most of them fail, the technology looks like a bust, and the survivors innovate their way onto a "plateau of productivity" where a stable, profitable model finally exists. I wanted 80 Acres to be that plateau. I especially wanted it after the Soli Organic merger, because Soli had a long and profitable field-to-greenhouse-to-vertical business, and I didn't think a company like that would trade a working strategy for a risky one. Here we are.

The hype cycle isn't a law. Plenty of technologies never leave the trough, and the metaverse is this year's clearest example. Facebook believed in the concept enough to rename itself, and Reality Labs has burned somewhere near \$80 billion since 2020. In March, Meta pulled Horizon Worlds, the flagship, off Quest headsets entirely, leaving it alive as a mobile app while the company redirects everything toward AI. At least the vertical farms grew food along the way.

The two failures aren't identical, and the difference is the important part. Horizon Worlds had no demand at any price; the mobile version is free and people still didn't show up. 80 Acres genuinely sold, in more than 18,000 retail locations. What failed was the margin. That's demand and supply meeting at the wrong number, not an absent market.

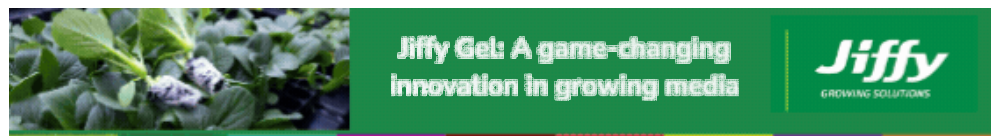
Which is exactly why I'm not ready to write off indoor growing. The technology works. It just can't win a price fight against soil and sunlight in the places where soil and sunlight are there already for free. However, Antarctic stations and any long-term extraterrestrial habitat will need vertical farms, and there's no field-grown alternative to undercut them. Home-scale units pencil out for a related reason: a home grower isn't pricing their own labor at wholesale, and isn't amortizing a \$95 million facility across a clamshell of spinach. Overall, I wouldn't abandon the concept of indoor sole-source artificial lighting, but

to say evidence is mounting against large scale facilities is undeniable.

[Read more here.](#)



A shot of 80 Acres production system, part of a promotional video from their website.



Revol Greens Closing

Revol Greens may close its doors this October. Revol currently operates multi-acre lettuce greenhouses, with its Minnesota location covering 10 acres and its Texas facility containing 20 acres of greenhouse production. According to the [WARN notice](#), Revol must sell the company or close by October 4th of this year.

Revol puts part of the blame on the recent *Cyclospora* outbreak, stating that the resulting uncertainty in consumer demand created challenges and impacted financial discussions. Consumer reports do show that produce purchasing has fallen off steeply in early July, though it's showing signs of recovery since. More on that later.

While it's disappointing that Revol is experiencing hardship, this runs against all the recent trends and expectations for the greenhouse industry, which is predicted to expand across North America and potentially double in size over the next decade.

Read more about it [here](#).



Revol Green's Minnesota facility. Photo credit aol.



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Local Greens During Outbreak

Did cyclosporiasis spur small-scale lettuce sales? Talking with a small-scale CEA grower here in Denver, it anecdotally seems true. [The New York Times recently published an article](#) on the shift toward local, small growers during the food safety outbreak.

The story highlights a farm that doubled its lettuce sales this past July, though it's worth noting that doubled means going from 700 heads to 1,500. For perspective, a small quarter-acre greenhouse I used to help out in had a production goal of 8,000 heads per month.

Little Leaf Farms comes up in the article as customers pivot to lettuce they can trust, a shift framed around transparency and confidence. So much of Taylor Farms' produce arrives in "mystery source" form, often with no information on where it was grown.

More telling, Little Leaf did see sales drop in early July, just like Revol. The difference is what came next: after a public outreach campaign highlighting the brand and CEA food safety, sales rebounded. The open question is whether the local growers riding this demand will keep those customers once the outbreak fades, and whether loyalty is something the produce industry can hold onto at all.

Hippo Harvest Investment

On the other side of things, Hippo Harvest has closed a major Series C. Investment is still flowing into CEA, even as vertical farming producers struggle.

Hippo Harvest is an interesting company. I had trouble working out whether they were a grower or a tech

company, and the answer is a combination of both. Business-wise, Hippo generates revenue through sales of lettuce and other leafy greens, grown in a production greenhouse.

The company's inception paints a different picture, though. CEO Eitan Marder-Eppstein first walked into greenhouses and found them reminiscent of early Amazon warehouses; fixed-process automation built on gantries, pneumatics and other rigid infrastructure. He set out to bring greenhouses closer to a modern organizational approach: modular, flexible and managed by robots. The result is a layout that's simple and almost old-school in operation, yet fully automated. A production module is a 3 ft. x 3 ft. tray, carried into the greenhouse by a robot and "hand" watered by a robot. Because of this, the company claims that common problems with greenhouse-wide recirculating nutrient systems, like the spread of root disease, simply cannot occur.

What makes this story different, and worthwhile, is who participated in the round. None other than Cox Farms, operator of BrightFarms and Mucci Farms, led the investment. BrightFarms is the company I watched shift away from deep water culture as recently as 2022, toward NFT and trough-based systems. The word I got from Cox on that shift is that it comes down to how quickly and cheaply a system can be changed. If a DWC pond becomes unusable through disease or sodium buildup, thousands of gallons of water may need to be disposed of, a huge production area goes offline, and there's an enormous amount of cleaning to do. In an NFT system, reservoirs can be isolated without stopping production, channels can be pulled and cleaned individually, and plumbing can be modified mid-cycle. With that framework in mind, it's easy to understand why a company like Cox Farms would be drawn to a modular system.

Hippo plans to expand into a 30-acre greenhouse in Hollister, California, where they intend to grow spinach and butter lettuce. [Read more about the investment here.](#)



Hippo Harvest's robot carrying a production module in their production greenhouse.

Corteva Split

Corteva is splitting in two. Crop protection keeps the Corteva name; the seed business Vylor takes Pioneer, Brevant, and Dairyland with it. The board approved this last October, and it's expected to close in the back half of this year, so it's effectively here.

The stated reasoning is capital allocation and strategic focus. This is likely a continuation of the "merge-to-split" strategy that originally brought Dow and Dupont together. The reasoning behind this is to reduce redundancies and create a clear focus on company direction. When Dow and Dupont originally merged,

it was already understood the agribusiness division, materials science, and specialty products would become three separate companies.

[Read more about the split here.](#)



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