

**OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,
FOOD AND FORESTRY**

2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, OK 73105-4912

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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Jeanetta Cooper, Consumer Protection Services, (405) 522-5971.

**Cannas have long added vibrant color to business
of southwest Oklahoma Farm**

CARNEGIE, Okla. – Six of one, two million of the other.

Sure that's not how the phrase goes about two ways of considering the same thing. However, the Horn Canna Farm originated and continues to operate in southwest Oklahoma because they don't take the same path as others.

The story of Horn Canna Farm, Inc. dates to the 1920s when Dustin Snow's Great Grandma Frances Horn received six canna bulbs from her aunt in Arkansas. Before long the cannas had claimed a large portion of the family's vegetable garden. That's when Snow's Great Grandpa John Horn started taking cannas on his daily vegetable routes to surrounding communities in 1928. Even during tough times, his canna sales grew and became a significant source of income for the family.

An endeavor that started with six canna bulbs decades ago remains a family business four generations deep that now produces about two million bulbs annually.

They have shipped bulbs to not only other states, but to several countries including, Dubai, Greece, Italy and Thailand.

When John and Frances Horn's son Neil was only 15 years old, he traded his parents a Jersey calf for the rights to the canna business. Instead of raising peanuts or cotton, or going the direction of wheat and cattle, Neil believed he could make a go of it with a tropical plant in Caddo County.

Today Dustin and wife Nikki Snow grow about 70 acres of cannas.

"We've talked about what in the world led his great grandpa to peddle them and then what made Dustin Snow's grandfather come along and go, 'I could make a business out of this'" Nikki said. "What in the world possessed that man to think he could make a crop out of this tropical plant? It was his forward thinking and creativity."

Her husband fully agrees.

"He was a creative person," Snow said. "He really enjoyed creating equipment that would make this work, both the harvest equipment and the washing apparatus. He believed in these plants. He married my grandmother two days before he

was shipped off to World War II. So he always told people that he took care of her to take care of his cannas.”

That love of cannas within the family was passed from Neil and Louise Horn to their daughter Jolene Horn Snow and husband Butch. They took entrepreneurial spirit of her parents – and grandparents – and added many improvements, streamlining the harvesting process and traveling outside their home state for sales.

Dustin and Nikki joined the business in 1994, adding computers to help with ordering and shipments. Jolene and Butch retired from the daily operations of the farm in 2008. A couple of years later drought would set in and would remain more on than off until 2015. The business persevered.

“Our market focus is changing to a higher end market and less to high volume, low profit,” Dustin Snow said. “One thing that hasn’t changed going back to my great grandfather is the commitment to quality.”

Other states, other nations

Horn Canna Farm has spanned time and the globe.

A few years back Nikki Snow was contacted on behalf of a man in Bangkok, Thailand.

“He was building an exquisite resort in Bangkok and he wanted his guests to be able to look out of their cabana and see rows and rows and rows of cannas. His idea was to have this rainbow of color out in this field.”

The man’s sister, who lived in New York, visited the Horn Canna Farm to see the cannas for herself. Her brother had 25,275 canna bulbs shipped to Thailand.

The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry (ODAFF) plays a role in facilitating and certifying Horn’s cannas so they may be shipped to other states, and perhaps more importantly, to other countries. Many of those shipments must be accompanied with a State or Federal Phytosanitary Certificate, issued from the Consumer Protections Services (CPS) division of ODAFF.

There are other growers of cannas in Oklahoma, but Jeanetta Cooper, who works with Plant Protection & Certification Programs in CPS, says Horn Cannas is the largest in the state. Through the years, Cooper said ODAFF has issued phytosanitary certificates to this particular farm for shipment to Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Jersey, Ohio, Virginia and Puerto Rico.

Plus, phytosanitary certificates have been issued for export to Australia, the Bahamas, Barbados, Canada, Dubai, Greece, Italy,

Lativa, the Netherlands, South Africa, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom.

For example, in order to ship rhizomes, a stem, to Canada, the Federal Phytosanitary Certificate must state that the plant material was grown in an area that is found free of soybean cyst nematode and Columbia root-knot nematode, based on negative results of an official survey.

“Each fall, we take soil samples from all the growing fields, Oklahoma State University does the testing for nematodes and sends me the findings,” Cooper said. “Then I am able to certify each shipment as found free from those regulated pests. We routinely inspect the rhizomes once harvested for any storage pests. We also certify the plant material is shipped free of soil and produced in an area free from Japanese beetle based on negative trapping.”

In living color

On Mondays through Fridays, between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. visitors from across Oklahoma pull off a county road onto the gravel driveway of Horn Canna Farm to marvel at the vibrant canvas of red, yellow, pink and orange cannas and stop by the office to ask questions. However, visitors can drive by the farm

and take a look at the cannas during office hours, weeknights and weekends, Nikki Snow said.

“September is peak season and the best time to view the field at its best,” she added.

Dustin Snow said planting begins about April 1 while harvest starts on or soon after October 1 and lasts about six weeks.

The cannas are loaded are taken to the barn and washed.

“After they are all washed the first time, then we wash them again and that’s when we sort for size and we trim out any other plant material by hand with knives,” Snow said. “They are sorted by size and ready for shipment at that time. We have a couple of different sizes that we sell depending on the customer. Most of our products are 3 to 5 eye bulbs. Each eye makes a plant.”

Processing of the bulbs will continue until about February 1.

Snow not only grew up around this process, but has been a full-time employee for 22 years. That doesn’t mean that he is any less amazed by the beauty of the crops than he was as a child.

“There are some moments of the year where you just look out and say, ‘Wow,’ especially when the weather starts to cool and they are fully grown,” Snow said. “The prettiest time of the year to me is the first blooms of the season and then right before harvest. We’re impressed with the beauty of the crop.”

With that statement, Nikki Snow added, “And thankful.”

Her husband gently nodded his head and said, “Yes, yes, thankful.”

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Photo caption: Today Dustin and wife Nikki Snow grow about 70 acres of cannas near Carnegie, Okla.

Photo caption: Horn Canna Farm, Inc. in southwest Oklahoma dates to the 1920s.