

Front Lines

6/25/2012

Ferry Morse Sold, Nearly 200 Laid Off

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Seed Holdings, Inc. purchased the home and garden division of Jiffy International AS, including Ferry Morse Seed Co. (USA) and A.E. McKenzie Inc. (Canada), in late May. Simultaneously, Jiffy has taken a minority shareholding in Seed Holdings. Seed Holdings is also the shareholder of Plantation Products, LLC, a merchandiser of flower and vegetable seed packets and the owner of consumer gardening brands NK Lawn & Garden, American Seeds, Fredonia and Plantation Products.

After the purchase, Seed Holdings, Inc. immediately laid off about half the Ferry Morse workforce nationwide. According to news reports in Oregon and Kentucky, 199 seed factory workers were laid off at two plants with a 60-day lump-sum payment.

The factory in Fulton, Kentucky, had operated for 53 years, while the White City, Oregon, plant has been open since 2009.

Eddy Crittendon, economic development director in Fulton, told a local television station he was caught off guard since the company gave workers and government officials no notice. "There's folks who've been employed out there for 30 to 40 years; (who) have given their whole life to the company," he told the station. "Whenever bad things happen, an opportunity opens. Maybe we can turn this into some type of opportunity in the future."

Ferry Morse Seed Co. has been selling seed packets since 1856, and can be found in mass merchant, big box stores and independent retailers nationwide. The product line includes seeds, seed-starting accessories, lawn seed, bulbs and gifts. The following brands are part of the Ferry Morse and McKenzie portfolios: Ferry Morse Seeds, McKenzie, Lilly Miller McFayden and Green Arbor Pike Seeds.

According to a press release, the companies expect the combination will create significant synergies, including optimized logistic solutions and exciting product development. The exclusive cooperation with Jiffy will ensure access to state-of-the-art technology, giving the home gardener the same high-quality products as used by most industrial growers.

Headquarters for the new company will be in Norton, Massachusetts, the current location of Plantation LLC. Calls for further details were not returned as of press time. **GP**