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What's Got Me Feeling Optimistic

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Optimism. It's not a currency traded all that often in agricultural businesses. Especially if you're a dirt farmer, like how I was brought up. Nope, we'd rather spit and curse and screw innocent bugs into the ground with our big toe before looking on the bright side of near about anything. Life is hard, dirty and not in our favor from sun up to sun up, dag nabbit. That's just the way it is.

Despite my dirt farmer upbringing and outlook, I'm feeling pretty good about the future—both my future and yours. Why? I have several reasons. Hilton Carter, for one. He's a 37-year-old artist in Baltimore. And Annie Dornan-Smith, a 22-year-old graphic artist in London. And Joseph Wanek, a 31-year-old Iowan. According to a September Washington Post story, these folks have 180, 50 and 45 plants, respectively, in their homes. Do you think they have an interest in plants? I'd call it an obsession. All that watering, trimming, feeding—and time spent away from family and friends (a big deal for Millennials!)—shows some serious dedication.

What about this has me feeling optimistic? First of all, I have to hand it to Millennials. When they get interested in something—health and wellness, politics, entertainment, home beer brewing, pickles—they go all in. They pull a level of dedication out of their back pocket that few of my generation were ever blessed with. Good for them! And good for us, they've found houseplants.

Second, Millennials are a sharing group. I'm not sure they've heard or could ever relate to Simon & Garfunkel's "I Am A Rock." Millennials bring their interests to the world, saying, "See this? It's really cool and you should try it, too." Social media gives them a way to share their interests like never before. Just search for the hashtags associated with foliage fanatics, such as #urbanjungle, #monsteramonday, #jungalow and many more on Instagram. Plants, plants and more plants!

Third, houseplants die. One of the young folks in that Washington Post article acknowledged this as a fact! "Some are just supposed to die," Hilton is quoted as saying. Well, what do you know—plants dying is acceptable! One of the issues our industry has had for decades is that folks can't bear to have something they are nurturing suddenly up and die on them. After all, what does that say about them as a person? Looks like Millennials are getting a clue that this is how life works. And again, good for us—because we'll just keep growing more.

Another reason I'm feeling optimistic is that indoor plants really do allow us as garden centers to sell so much

more. I'm looking around my house at the 12 houseplants in my living room. Other than the 26-year-old Christmas cactus I have in a basic terra cotta pot, all of them are in something more decorative that I had to purchase: a wicker basket, a self-watering African violet pot, a giant open-topped glass terrarium. And I could do so much more—shelves, shabby chic or antique-y vessels, macramé hangers. I could even put in grow lights and a green wall—gasp! Millennials are all in, remember. What are they going to want and need from their local garden center? I'd say everything.

There's one last reason for my optimism: hunkering down. The world seems a little frenetic, like it's spinning a bit faster than most of the population can handle right about now. We're slowing retreating back into our homes and quiet spaces. We want them to be green and lush, don't we? **GP**