



# Techni-Gro Greenhouses

Chilliwack BC



# A high-tech industry

**Although Techni-Gro may sound like the Lower Mainland's newest high-tech firm, it is in fact a seven-acre greenhouse operation in Chilliwack. Nevertheless, Techni-Gro Greenhouses—with two and a half of its acres under glass—does use its fair share of technology to grow cut-flower gerbera daisies.**

The greenhouses at Techni-Gro are largely controlled by computers responsible for settings such as temperature, shade, heat, and ventilation. The gerbera plants are situated in pots raised two feet off the ground and watered individually so that each plant gets the same amount of water and fertiliser as the next. Any excess water that drains from the flowerpots is then collected, filtered through lava rock to remove bacteria but maintain nutrients, and recycled. This water, fertilisation, and filtration process is controlled by computers as well.

Pest control at Techni-Gro Greenhouses is also done in a technologically advanced way. Instead of pesticides, the operation uses biological controls to protect its plants. For this process, a population of beneficial insects—the natural enemies of harmful pests—is established in the greenhouse to keep the number of harmful insects to a minimum.

Having been involved in greenhouse horticulture for many years, William Stolze and Brian Pouwels, brothers-in-law and owners and operators of Techni-Gro Greenhouses, are quite the technical experts themselves. While William takes care of management and growing, Brian takes care of operational concerns such as the computers and boiler. He is also responsible for fabrication and

maintenance and even built the greenhouse's environmentally friendly water, filtration, and fertilisation unit.

For William, his initial desire to go into the trade was borne out of watching his father manage a greenhouse of tropical plants in Holland. That experience made it easy for him to decide, at 16 years of age, that he wanted to attend a high school for the greenhouse industry. "My dad was in the business, so I grew up with it," he explains. "I liked it, so it was not a difficult decision to make."

Three years later, when he was 19 years old, his father retired, and William took over the family business. After operating the greenhouse for over a decade and beginning a family of his own, William, his wife Heleen, and their three children immigrated with Brian, his wife, Janete, and their two children to Canada in order to escape the pressures of life in Holland. William comments, "Where we came from, it was so stressful. It's very hectic over there, and I didn't like that as much. It's more easygoing here in Canada. There's more space, and it's a lot nicer working environment."

William and Brian began Techni-Gro Greenhouses promptly after arriving in Canada in 1990, growing tropical plants just as William did in Holland. But,

though Techni-Gro Greenhouses was able to grow a good product, it could not compete with the cheap tropical imports brought in from California and Florida. They began looking for an alternative.

"It was actually a salesman who came to us," recalls William. "He wanted to sell us some gerberas, and I said, 'Why do you want to do that?' He said, 'Well, this is a good market.' At that time, there was only one person in the Fraser Valley who was growing gerbera daisies, and he got great prices for them year round. Basically, the salesman guaranteed me that it would be good, and so we started off. And he was right, it was a good market."

Although Techni-Gro Greenhouses now has three other competitors rather than just one, William and Brian are not concerned. In fact, they're pleased. "The product is in good demand; otherwise, there wouldn't be four growers doing it already," William comments. "It's actually good to have some competition. It keeps your eyes open, and it keeps your product up to quality standards. If there's no competition, you make your money too easy; you fall asleep; and it's no good. So we like competition."

And while William and Brian welcome a challenge, they also welcome visitors to their farm. "Our greenhouse is always

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## FARM FACTS

**Employed –**  
*seasonal: 3*

*year-round: 6*

**Gross Farm Sales –**  
*\$1.1 million*

**Land Owned –**  
*7 acres*

**Land Leased –**  
*0 acres*

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open,” William explains. “If people want to come in and have a tour, ask questions, no problem. We’re happy to tell them everything they want to know. I think when people understand what’s going on, they appreciate it. Quite a few times, we get tour groups in the greenhouse and people think we use a lot of chemicals to control pests. But if we show them how we use beneficial insects, their mouths fall open, and they say, ‘Oh, we didn’t know that’. Then they appreciate it more later on.”

And we do, William. We do.

