



Brian Markham, Hammer Packaging Rochester, NY

As dependent as the seed packet industry is on seed breeders, growers, and sellers, it is equally reliant on the designers and manufacturers of the actual packets. And that's where **Hammer Packaging** comes in. The 104-year-old New York-based company does business with virtually every national and regional seed company in the country. Owned by the Hammer family since 1912, it currently has the capacity to fold one-and-a-half million packets in a single day.



Hammer Packaging employs 450 people. During the busy season, the factory operates 24 hours a day, sometimes 6-7 days a week.

Brian Markham, you might say, is the public face of the seed packet industry. There was a time when seeds were a major part of Hammer Packaging's business. However, says Brian, times have changed. "When I started in 1992, one third of Hammer's business was seed packets. Since then, the home garden seed business has downsized some, while other parts of Hammer's business have grown significantly."



Brian Markham (r) works with Robert Wacker of Floramedia (l) to choose images for seed packets.

The past two-plus decades have brought many other changes to the seed packet industry as well. Brian remembers when companies such as Sunoco and McDonalds would offer seed packets as premiums for, say, filling up your gas tank, or buying a Kid's Meal. At that time the seed industry was simpler, more transparent. What we see now, explains Brian, is the consolidation of producers in the seed business. And yet, branding strategies have prompted sellers to divide the product into many segments. Consolidation in the industry will continue, predicts Brian. And while this may result in fewer varieties overall being available to consumers, opportunities to purchase will likely expand. He points to positive developments

in recent years. “In 2009, when the Obamas moved into the White House and created a vegetable garden on the South Lawn, there was a huge surge in packet seed sales!”

“Seeds are sort of in my blood,” says Brian. “My father was a Cornell extension agent and a big conservationist. He grew up in a family of gardeners, bought a farm and moved us there in 1979.” Brian recently purchased the 110-acre family farm, located about an hour from his home, and spends one day a week caring for the property. He calls this his “therapy time.” At home, he and his wife Theresa tend six raised beds and “a bunch of flowers.” Like his father, he has passed this passion for the garden on to his three grown children, particularly his daughter, an avid gardener who studied environmental science and public policy.



When not at the factory, Brian connects with the land on his 110-acre farm in the Finger Lakes region.

Another of Brian Markham’s lifelong interests is photography. Not so coincidentally, one very important facet of the seed packet business is garden images. As a licensed partner to Floramedia, based out of Holland, Brian’s clients have the right to use the company’s picture library of over 100,000 images, a huge attraction to seed companies. Personally, Brian still finds opportunities to photograph aspects of the seed business to which he has unique access. Whether he was attracted to the packet seed business through a combination of life experiences—which include an education in printing management from RIT (Rochester Institute of Technology), a passion for photographic images, and a tradition of gardening and farming—or whether his enthusiasm was drawn out by his decades of interactions with individuals who are passionate about growing things, is an open question. One thing is certain, Brian Markham is where he belongs.