

the speedling story

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While on a trip to Jordan, former Chairman Tang I-Fang was intrigued by the sight of an oasis in the desert across the border in Israel. On closer inspection, he realised that the oasis was full of seedlings grown in triangular plastic plant holders. He learnt that the man behind the seedling technology was in the midst of a dispute with an Israeli company, which was selling the technology without a license in Israel. George Todd, owner of Speedling Inc, a Florida-based company, wanted to sue.

Tang advised against it. “Don’t waste your money. The lawsuit will probably take a decade to settle and you may not even win. And the lawyers’ fees would be astronomical.”

“Wouldn’t you rather sell the company?” asked Tang. Todd agreed. They discussed terms and the deal was sealed, right there in Jordan.

Today Speedling, a wholly-owned Wearnes subsidiary in the US and a world leader in transplantation technology for the agriculture and forestry industries, has eight nurseries in the US and ten nurseries in China. Every year it produces more than two billion vegetable, fruit, ornamental and forestry seedlings. It also has horticultural products and a complete line of supplies and equipment offering customers a “one-stop shop” for their agricultural needs.

Speedling’s transplant technology gives farmers higher yields. Normally transplants of seedlings have a high mortality rate, but when grown in these plastic containers, the shape of an inverted pyramid, to a size where the plants are sturdy enough to take on the elements, the near zero mortality rate almost guarantees a 90 percent yield compared to the usual 60 percent yield. The extra 30 percent is money in the bank for the farmer.

Currently in Wearnes’ investment sector, Speedling has tremendous potential, says Tang. “With good management, it can have an international application in farming, particularly in China and the US. I believe there’s a future there. But the opportunity must be explored.”

Wearnes now plans to grow the Speedling China ornamental business to export flowers to the world. Its plants in Kunming and Guangdong in China have good yields and low cost advantages which, together with the special technology, may be a winning combination. Its US nurseries are also venturing into higher yielding ornamental plants and are also looking into growing traditional Chinese medicinal herbs. With more focus, it is likely the business will continue to grow.

