

Phat Panda:

From coco to precision cultivation



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At Phat Panda, every cultivation decision has to work at scale.

Inside the company's Spokane facility, cultivation runs almost continuously. With 52 independent flowering rooms spread across roughly 60,000 square feet of canopy, harvests happen nearly every day.

Phat Panda built its reputation in Washington before expanding into California and Massachusetts, growing into a recognizable multistate brand with a broad genetic offering and a strong focus on the people behind the operation.

With that many rooms operating at once, even small inefficiencies can affect the operation as a whole. For Mojave Morelli, Director of Farming Operations, much of the job comes down to improving workflows and helping teams understand how decisions made inside one room can have an impact across the facility.

"When you're scaling from a couple hundred lights to a couple thousand lights, from 10 employees to 500 employees, it's a difficult task," says Morelli. "But that's really the exciting part, honestly."

Morelli joined Phat Panda more than a decade ago on the cultivation team before moving into a leadership role. Today, much of his focus is on cultivation practices, quality management, and finding better ways to improve consistency across the facility.

That very mindset eventually led Phat Panda toward one of its most significant operational changes: transitioning from coco to Grodan stone wool.

For the team, however, it was never going to be as simple as replacing one growing media with another. They wanted to understand how the change would affect the crop, the people and the operation as a whole.

"People come first, plant second, product third"

— Mojave Morelli,
Director of Farming Operations at Phat Panda





Refining cultivation at scale:

Managing dozens of flowering rooms means every part of the cultivation system has to work together. Environmental conditions, irrigation, airflow, plant spacing, and substrate behavior can all influence how a room performs from one cycle to the next.

For Morelli, that means paying close attention to the details teams can control, from dripper placement and trellis height to irrigation timing and vegetative timelines.

“When you have all those things dialed in, you pull down great, consistent crops turn after turn,” says Morelli.

As the team looked more closely at irrigation, environmental capacity and conditions inside the root zone, the role of the substrate became harder to ignore. Phat Panda had already been crop steering in coco, but the team saw an opportunity for greater control, more predictable root-zone behavior and cleaner, more efficient workflows.

That led the team to evaluate whether Grodan stone wool could offer a more steerable and efficient system at scale.



Why Phat Panda transitioned from coco to stone wool:

Phat Panda approached the potential switch as a full operational evaluation, examining how a different substrate could affect both the crop and the facility as a whole.

“We looked at labor, fertilizer consumption, total water use and the ease of moving products around,” recalls Morelli. *“We tried to evaluate every aspect of it.”*



“Coco’s kind of like an automatic car, where stone wool is much more of a manual.”

— Mojave Morelli
Director of Farming
Operations at Phat Panda

Rather than converting the facility all at once, Phat Panda trialed several Grodan products and configurations, from Grodan Improved Hugos to Uni-Slabs and various other block-and-slab combinations, comparing how each setup fit the facility’s irrigation approach, environmental conditions and daily workflows.

The team also wanted to ensure that any operational gains would not come at the expense of finished quality. There was concern that *“the flower might look good, but the nose, terpenes and overall flavor could be affected”* after moving from coco to stone wool.

Instead, the early results told a different story: *“What we saw right from the beginning was increased yields, better cannabinoid production and better terpene production.”*

The trials also showed how stone wool could give the cultivation team more control when adjusting irrigation and managing conditions inside the root zone. The larger slab configuration added more substrate volume and helped reduce stratification throughout the slab, giving Phat Panda even more confidence in the switch.

“It didn’t take more than probably six months to substantiate that stone wool was a much cleaner, more consistent and efficient substrate to work with,” says Morelli.

Phat Panda ultimately standardized around Grodan A-OK 1.5-inch Starter Plugs, Improved GR10 Gro-Blocks and 36-inch pre-cut Gro-Slabs, with three GR10s per slab.



Learning a more steerable system:

Stone wool gave Phat Panda more control, but it also changed how Morelli and the cultivation team approached their irrigation strategy.

With a more responsive substrate, the team needed to understand how timing, dry backs, runoff and shot sizes could be adjusted to influence the crop more precisely.

That was where Grodan's support became an important part of the process.

Phat Panda worked closely with Account Manager Andrew Wilmerding and Crop Specialist Jon Jirikovec throughout the transition. Wilmerding supported the product and configuration evaluation, while Jirikovec worked with the cultivation team on root-zone management and irrigation strategy.

Rather than leaving the team to figure out the system on its own, that guidance helped create a clearer plan for each stage of the crop.

"Jon built out a really good roadmap, showing us where we should be at each phase, from clone to veg to flower, and what to do if we weren't hitting those targets," says Morelli.

That structure gave the team more clarity as they worked through wet-up strategies, rooting in, irrigation timing, shot sizes, and runoff targets.

As the system continued to evolve, Grodan's involvement extended beyond the initial product change. Together, both teams reviewed charts, discussed irrigation parameters, and worked through how different cultivars and room conditions responded to the substrate.

For the cultivation team, that collaboration and knowledge sharing helped turn the new irrigation strategy into something they could understand and adjust from room to room.

"When people understand why we do something, that's when it really starts to click," says Morelli.



"The transition was a lot more seamless than I thought it was going to be."

— Mojave Morelli
Director of Farming Operations at Phat Panda





Cleaner workflows. Greater consistency.

As Phat Panda continued refining its irrigation strategy, the benefits of the transition to stone wool became increasingly clear.

The facility saw roughly **a 9-9.5% increase in trimmed flower yield**, and vegetative timelines also dropped significantly, with many rooms moving **from roughly 21-28 days down to approximately 10-14 days**.

At the same time, Phat Panda reported improved cannabinoid and terpene expression, along with more consistent performance from room to room.

Loading flower rooms, staging plants, resetting tables between harvests and moving product through the facility became easier to manage as the team standardized around a more uniform and steerable substrate. With the facility fully transitioned to stone wool, those gains reinforced the direction Phat Panda was already heading.

By that point, the decision was clear: *"There's no turning back."*



Built on people and systems:

Those results mattered, but they were only part of the story. Behind the transition was a culture of communication, consistency and continuous improvement.

Many of the facility's SOPs, workflow adjustments and cultivation strategies have been refined internally by teams looking for better ways to communicate, move through rooms more efficiently and improve consistency from cycle to cycle.

"Much of our success has come from our team figuring out how to do things a little bit better and a little bit more efficiently, run to run," says Morelli. "It all comes back to having the right people."

That mindset is what makes precision cultivation work at scale. It is less about chasing trends and more about building a system where teams can keep getting better.

The work is never really finished. Every cycle is another opportunity to strengthen the system behind the crop.

Phat Panda's Products & Equipment

GROWING MEDIA:

- Grodan A-OK 1.5" Starter Plugs
- Grodan Improved GR10 Gro-Blocks, 4"x4"x4"
- Grodan Improved Gro-Slabs 36"x6"x4" with three pre-cut holes

IRRIGATION & FERTIGATION:

- Netafim and Rivulis drip irrigation systems
- 0.3 and 0.5 GPH drip emitters
- Dosatron nutrient injection systems
- Multi-shot irrigation strategies

LIGHTING:

- Gavita HID lighting
- Fluence LED lighting

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL:

- Integrated HVAC and reheat systems



If you're interested in trialing Grodan stone wool, learning more about the GroSens Suite, or discussing a transition from another substrate, reach out through our contact page at [Grodan101.com](https://www.grodan101.com). Our team is happy to answer questions, discuss your setup, and help you determine if Grodan is the right fit.



PHAT PANDA



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