

Web Exclusive

Acres Online

Chris Beytes

Wow, what a conference! I'm speaking of the International Bedding Plant Conference. If you weren't there, you missed what many attendees told me was one of the best seminar programs in a long time. But more about that in a minute.

It's Rack Survey time

I need your help! The November issue will feature our 3rd annual Shipping Cart Survey. If you ship your product on carts, I need you to fill out a survey, this week if possible. It's quick and confidential, as always. I need to know how much production space you have, how many racks you have to serve that space, how many times you turn them a season, and a few other questions. Go to <http://www.growertalks.com/cartsurvey/> to fill it out. It'll just take a minute, I promise, but the information you provide will help you compare your rack shipping system to other growers. If you have problems with the link, e-mail me and I'll fax you a survey.

While you're doing that, please consider filling out our Wage & Benefit Survey if you haven't already done so. <http://www.growertalks.com/wbsurvey/>. Again, it's quick and painless!

Unlike living in Florida lately...

Hurricane Jeanne

Last e-mail, Florida had been hit by three hurricanes. Now it's four. The last time one state suffered four hurricanes in a single season was Texas in 1886. Unreal.

I tried, unsuccessfully, to reach a couple of growers I know in the Stuart area to see how they fared a second direct hit. Next, I tried an old friend, Sal Carullo, of Merritt Island Nursery near Port Canaveral, which endured the highest recorded winds during Frances. Sal's about a mile up the road from my old greenhouse. Sal sold his business a couple years ago, but he still runs it for the new owner.

"Rough" was his only word to describe the three hurricanes that pounded Merritt Island, a barrier island bordered by the Banana River on the east and the Indian River on the west. Charley wasn't too bad, Sal recalls. It took out some sidewalls and did some roof damage to his 200,000-sq. ft. of foliage greenhouses. Sal managed to get most of the damage repaired, and then Frances hit. "It was bad," he says, taking out some gable ends, a hoop house, sidewalls.... "Whatever we'd fixed after Charlie was all that was left," he says. Sal had already started to contract for repairs (he's got \$5,000 worth of fiberglass on the ground waiting for installation) when Jeanne hit his already beat-up nursery.

Crop-wise, Sal says his foliage (mainly 3 gal.) is also pretty beat up. Areca palms managed to come through

relatively unscathed, but everything else is wind-whipped or spotted from lying in the water. Considering that foliage takes from six months to several years to reach saleable size, Sal expects it will be well into next year before he's fully back into business.

No one can yet calculate all the losses to Florida's industry. The FNGLA was estimating \$530 to \$600 million after just Charley and Frances. A telling statistic might be next year's Floriculture Crops Summary. For 2003, Florida had \$823 million in wholesale sales. But the 2004 number won't include the many costs of repairs and rebuilding. Not to mention the stress and fatigue that I could hear in Sal's voice.

By the way, the FNGLA says FNATS 2004 will proceed as scheduled, September 30-October 2 in Orlando.

Bedding conference rocks

We had 550 growers, industry members and suppliers from 31 states and 10 countries at our first (and likely not our last) International Bedding Plant Production Conference, held last Monday through Thursday near Chicago. It was a killer event, judging from comments we received from attendees and exhibitors alike. What was also cool is that it was Ball Publishing's first conference partnership with OFA, which lent planning and marketing support to our pest control sessions. A special thanks to OFA's Steve Carver for organizing the pesticide recertification credits.

We did some very cool interactive panel discussions and interview format seminars that are rarely seen at other industry events. And our speakers were amazingly candid with details about their businesses. For instance, Abe and Art Van Wingerden told their audience that Metrolina Greenhouses grossed \$9.78 per sq. ft. in 1990 from 30 acres, and this year will gross \$17.15 per sq. ft. from 100 acres, proving that they've become more profitable and efficient as they've expanded. And Bell Nursery's Paul Chisholm outlined every detail of Bell's acclaimed merchandising program, including how they hire, pay and promote merchandisers, to an audience filled with growers who supply not only Home Depot (Bell's biggest customer), but also Lowes, Wal-Mart and Kmart.

Will we do it again? Chances are good, in which case our second Bedding Plant Conference will be in 2007. Our next conference will be the 2005 International Plug & Cutting Conference, to be held at the Dearborn Hyatt, Dearborn, Michigan, September 25-29, 2005. For more information, or to add yourself to the mailing list for a brochure, e-mail Michelle Mazza at mmazza@ballpublishing.com

Container regs simplified

One of the key seminars last week was a session featuring Bob Dolibois, ANLA, and Lin Schmale, SAF, on the new container regulations. Bob did a great job simplifying the rules for growers and retailers. In a nutshell, you simply need to comply with the spirit of the law, which is as follows:

- List the exact volume of the container in U.S. and metric measurements (i.e. 1.2 quarts/1.124 liters).
- List what's being grown in the container. You don't have to give the genus and species; however you're currently labeling things is fine (i.e. Wave petunia; red geranium; assorted foliage; annual).
- List the name, city, state and zip of who's responsible for growing or distributing it (i.e. Joe's Nursery; Acme Grocery Stores) unless it's being retailed by the same company that grew it.

This information can be on a sticker, a tag or on a sign over the plants. It doesn't apply to grower-to-grower sales; in other words, plug trays don't have to be labeled. It just applies to retail sales.

Bottom line? Don't sweat every little possible question, angle or detail. Just do your honest best to provide the above information and you should be okay with the regulators.

Frank's Lisa Oliver joins the Co-op

One of many people I talked to at the conference was Lisa Oliver, vice-president and buyer for Frank's ... until she was let go in the recent bankruptcy, that is. Lisa landed solidly on her feet in a New Product Development position with the Kalamazoo Co-op, and she was excited about the opportunity.

I'm happy for her and for the Co-op, because I've gone on record as saying that, thanks in great part to Lisa, Frank's had a spring plant selection that rivaled any good independent's. Lisa was also one of the first chain retailers to travel with a grower to the California Pack Trials. It's just a shame that Frank's concept as a whole didn't support her good work as a plant buyer. Hopefully, the Co-op's customers will take advantage of her experience, enthusiasm and knowledge. Good luck, Lisa!

Finally ...

Our new annual NCSU Insecticide and Fungicide Guide went out with the September issue, and we've been getting calls from subscribers looking for additional copies. If you want extra copies for your business, they're just \$9.95 each. E-mail Ann Grooms (agrooms@ballpublishing.com) to order. Also, watch for our NCSU PGR Guide, coming with your October issue.

See you next time,

Chris

Chris Beytes

Editor

GrowerTalks