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FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2024

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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

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Salary & Benefits Survey—Need Your Input!

For the second year in a row, *GrowerTalks* is partnering with AmericanHort and Industry Insights to conduct an industry-wide salary and benefits survey for growers and retailers. Information from this survey is critical, as growers can use it to understand wages across the industry, but also as we recruit more individuals into the field. I can say firsthand that many students express concern with the expected low pay of agricultural jobs. Surveys like this highlight the benefits and wages that our industry offers, promoting interest and supporting more entry.

This is the 29th year this survey has been conducted by *GrowerTalks* and the 16th year with *Green Profit*. All respondents will receive the AmericanHort Salary & Benefits Industry Report prepared by Industry Insights in December. Premium member respondents will also receive the Comparison Report at no cost. Articles featuring the new data will be published in the December issue of *GrowerTalks* and the January issue of *Green Profit*.



You can access the survey [HERE](#). It won't take long and respondents will be entered into a drawing to win a Yeit Tundra 45 Hard Cooler (a \$325 value). The survey is open right now and closes on October 4, 2024, so make sure you fill it out and help us support you and the industry overall.



Sydney B. Meadows Scholarship Recipients

For the past 35 years, the Sydney B. Meadows Scholarship Endowment Fund (SBMSEF) has awarded scholarships to students studying nursery production from Southeastern schools. This year, 12 students from 10 universities were selected to receive a \$2,000 cash scholarship to support their studies. The recipients are selected through a competitive application process based on academics, determination and demonstrated interest.

This year's winners are:

- Phiala Drake, Texas Tech University
- Landon Erbrick, Auburn University (Sally Smith Scholarship)
- Kathryn Glenn, Clemson University (Arthur A. "Buck" Jones Scholarship)
- Elliott Kenney, University of Maryland-College Park
- Cassie Marbach, Texas A&M University (Dr. James & Faye Foret Scholarship)
- Grace Ramsey, Stephen F. Austin State University (Lee C. Howell Scholarship)
- Charlotte Simmons, Tennessee Tech University (Dr. Bryson L. James Scholarship)
- Meg Smolinski, University of Maryland (Art & Millie Lancaster Scholarship)
- April Sprague, Oregon State University (Richard J. Hackney Scholarship)
- Jonah Trevino, Texas Tech University
- Evan Villani, North Carolina State University
- Tyler Williamson, University of Georgia (Richard L. VanLandingham Scholarship)

The SBMSEF was first created by the Southern Nursery Association in 1989 and is now managed by the Horticulture Research Institute. Since inception, this endowment has awarded over \$650,000 to students pursuing a career in ornamental plant production. There are currently eight named scholarships. For more information on the scholarship or to apply in future years, check out [SBMSEF.org](https://sbmsef.org).

These students represent the future of our industry—please join me in giving them a hand.



The 2025 Insecticide, Miticide & Fungicide Guide is Here!

For over 10 years, *Grower Talks* magazine has published an annual guide for chemical application pest control. These guides are updated each year to ensure that growers have a one-stop information source with all new chemicals and updated information on any changes that may have occurred over the past year.

As always, this guide provides information in easily understandable forms, with quick guides and tables, as well as in-depth chemical lists. There are even a few case studies and stories weaved through to get a better feel for some of the opportunities. Plus, it's a fun read.

The guide is currently available in **English** and a Spanish version is coming soon.



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Important H-2A Program Update!

Grower Talks' Editor Jen Zurko shared this new information about the H-2A visa program.

Earlier this year, 17 states and two organizations filed suit against the Department of Labor over the final H-2A rule titled Improving Protections for Workers in Temporary Agricultural Employment in the United States (Final Rule). The Final Rule was set to go into effect on Thursday, August 29, 2024.

Right before the deadline, a federal court found that the Final Rule violates the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) as it attempts to unconstitutionally create law, infringing upon Congressional authority. It also found that DOL's actions were not deemed in "accordance with law" as required by the APA. While the DOL may assist Congress, it may not become Congress. The Court found that DOL has attempted to create rights that Congress has not legislated, such as a right to collective bargaining for agricultural workers.

Further, the Final Rule would cause financial harm to both the plaintiff states and plaintiff organizations, including increased administrative costs for state workforce agencies and employers, as DOL anticipates that changes to the annual effective date of new Adverse Effect Wage Rates could cost farms nationwide between \$12 and \$20 million over the next 10 years. These findings align with the Eleventh Circuit's ruling that "unrecoverable monetary loss is an irreparable harm."

Based on these findings, the Court ruled that the Final Rule violates the NLRA as it attempts to unconstitutionally create law, infringing upon Congressional authority. The DOL's actions were not deemed in "accordance with law" as required by the APA. However, the Court decided not to grant a nationwide injunction and the injunction applies only to the plaintiffs.

Since the ruling, DOL has put forward a statement announcing the delay in the Transition Schedule for Implementing the H-2A Application and Job Order Associated with the 2024 Farmworker Protection Final Rule.

The Court's ruling now prevents DOL from enforcing the Farmworker Protection Rule in the states that filed the suit: Georgia, Kansas, South Carolina, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. Because of this injunction, DOL cannot enforce the Farmworker Protection Rule in the specified states and entities while the injunction is in place.

The FLAG (Foreign Language Application Gateway) system is not set up to identify and process applications differently based on which state the application originated. Consequently, the DOL has delayed updating the FLAG system (IN ALL STATES FOR THE TIME BEING) and will continue to process applications according to the previous forms.

"The Department of Labor's delay in implementing the H-2A Worker Protection Rule, prompted by the recent Georgia case decision, highlights the concerns regarding the rule's suitability and the perceived haste in its advancement," said Matt Mika, AmericanHort's VP of Advocacy & Government Affairs. "AmericanHort is committed to collaborating with the Department of Labor to develop an H-2A Rule and program that effectively serves current and prospective participants."

For AmericanHort members, the organization has developed FAQs to summarize the court ruling and what it means for those members who participate in the H-2A program. AmericanHort has also been working with outside legal counsel Lynn Jacquez and Shawn Packer of JPH Law Firm. AmericanHort will continue to follow developments on the H-2A Final Rule closely with guidance from their outside counsel to ensure members have the tools and resources needed to remain compliant with federal rules and regulations as they're issued.

(Reminder that AmericanHort premium members are eligible to receive initial legal opinions and compliance access to expert legal advice related to workforce issues from AmericanHort partner JPH Law. If you aren't a premium member and would like to become one, visit AmericanHort.org to upgrade your membership.)

Go [HERE](#) to contact your representative directly to request they include language in upcoming funding legislation to apply the court's injunction nationwide.



Plug & Cutting Conference Around the Corner

Hopefully everyone is getting their bags packed to head down to Orlando, Florida, for AmericanHort's Plug & Cutting Conference just a couple weeks away. If you want to make connections and find the best young plant material in the country, this is the place to be. There's still time to register and make your way to the show floor. The tours have sold out, but that doesn't mean there won't be plenty of value in attending.

As always, there's a great educational lineup featuring production inputs, pest management and much more. If you're interested in expanding your offerings and looking to tap into new sources for young plant material, there's nowhere better.

The conference runs September 23-25 at the Caribe Royal Orlando—a wonderful resort located close to all the Orlando-y attractions that everyone loves. Check out the program and register [HERE](#).

Growing in Glass Substrates

As a substrate scientist, anytime I see something new and exciting in the world of growing media, I promise to share it with you. When I read this story in Jen White's *GreenTalks* newsletter, I got excited and wanted to pass it along.

There's been a good bit of discussion around recycling glass into sand across the country in recent years. After all, glass is made from sand, so why not put it back? I know there have been a few attempts in the past to utilize some of this sand as a growing media with different results. However, this recent study from materials scientists at the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley was a fun read. The researchers presented their work at the American Chemical Society's fall meeting in August.

The recycled glass is ground down into fine and smooth particles that are safe to touch. This process can mimic the physical properties of some inert growing media making it a good opportunity for use in hydroponic systems. However, I wonder if it can be utilized for our ornamental production, extending our media reserves. *I must state, the grinding process is very specific, so don't just start grinding glass bottles to offset your peat and bark costs.* Could the ground glass be transplanted with our flowers and shrubs? My thought is maybe—but we would have to evaluate it further.

You can check out Drs. Teresa Patricia Feria Arroyo and Julie Vanegas' work [HERE](#). Maybe make some glass-grown salsa of your own.

Drafting a Championship Landscape

As fall approaches, I pass the ball to Dr. Damon Abdi, who's always ready to share his strategy for the ultimate fantasy lineup.

As horticulturalists, we look forward to the fall for the favorable weather. Cooler temperatures make tending to the garden more comfortable, fall foliage (depending on where we live) adds a splash of color to our landscapes and conditions are just right for installing new plants. We share this enthusiasm for the fall season with another group: fantasy football fans. Similarities between these two groups abound, with both carefully crafting their roster of plants and players to accomplish one thing: success throughout the entire season. Whether we're curating our lists for the gridiron or the garden, creativity and careful planning are paramount.



Every garden and fantasy football roster should have some “safe bets,” or plants or players that we can rely upon to succeed throughout the season. First-round picks should be tried-and-true performers—reliable for the region, exciting and something to count on week in and week out throughout fall. These no-brainer selections often seem obvious for respective regions, as it seems everybody is rushing to get them ... but if you want to stand out, you will need to take some chances later in the draft.

Mix in some selections that might be a little out of the ordinary, perhaps pushing the boundaries of your hardiness zone. If selecting plants that may not be ideal for your hardiness zone, you might consider audibling into a zone defense (ensuring a healthy layer of mulch to insulate roots from freezing temperatures in winter). Planting cold-sensitive species near buildings can help shield plants from winter’s chill—a home-field advantage, indeed.

Taking chances with your roster of plants or players can yield exceptional results. Underutilized, under-recognized and rookie plants (new cultivar releases) may find success in the landscape if you give them a shot. Perhaps they succeed all season long; perhaps they show potential until the weather gets cold. Either way, a few good weeks (particularly early in the season) can pay dividends down the line. Some rookie plants will succeed for one season (annuals), several seasons (perennials) or be a bust in the landscape (for my fellow Chargers fans, a “Ryan Leaf”).

Having a gameplan for your selections is also essential to success. Knowing when to start certain plants or players is the key to winning. Putting certain selections into action too early in the season may be unwise (i.e. setting out cool-season plants before temperatures drop enough), whereas some selections only do well early in the season before fading late in the season (a warm-season plant starting off hot, but unable to maintain the success throughout the entire season).

When coaching up woody plants for long-term success, make sure that the route tree is well developed. Staking trees can help create straight, upright growth (a 9-route), but knowing when and where to make the right cuts can really help the canopy get open. Have a contingency plan for pest management—play some preventative defense (preemergent herbicides) to limit winter weeds and don’t be afraid to blitz the bed with fungicides if a rainy fall leads to disease issues.

While we have our key players on our roster and a gameplan devised, we reserve some selections for sentimental reasons. Maybe we want to install a hometown hero in our yard—a

native plant or a new release from a local plant breeder. Perhaps we want to install a plant just because it has a cool name. Or, quite possibly, we want to re-draft a plant that failed in past years ... but this could be the year it all comes together and it succeeds. Each fall brings new hope and excitement. So as the season kicks off, make sure your team is ready to succeed.

Think big,



Jeb Fields

Editor-at-Large

Nursery & Landscape Insider

This has been received by 31,755 of the hardest-working horticulturists in show business!

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