February Farm Update + Customer Experience + Meet Aster + More!



Crop culture and commentary for fresh-cut flower growers

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BLOOM BEAT

Crop culture and commentary for fresh-cut flower growers

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

February Farm Update
The Customer Experience
Meet SAF's Aster
Must-See Webinars
Pre-Register for Cultivate





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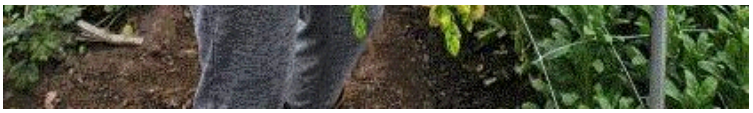
February Farm Update





Tater's snapdragons and ranunculus will be available for Valentine's Day—in spite of the polar vortex!

Our farm survived the polar vortex with minimal casualties. We spent more than three hundred hours below freezing—the gas bill for January is going to be shocking!

Tater and I camped out in one of our greenhouses for nine nights in a row to make sure we didn't lose the Valentine's Day or Mother's Day crops. We were lucky compared to some; I have read plenty of heartbreaking stories of frozen greenhouses and collapsed tunnels on Instagram. Winter can be cruel, and there are plenty of variables outside of our control. This time, Tater and I just got lucky.

The timing couldn't have been worse, however, because Valentine's Day inventory is already limited due to the low light we get this time of year. The last two weeks before the holiday influence whether the flowers will finish on time. The best solution was to limit what we sell this week to make sure we have enough for Valentine's Day. It's not ideal, but it's the hand we were dealt.

As for how our greenhouses held up in the weather ... a few nights went down to -10F and the heaters in all the greenhouses were running and were barely keeping temperature at 40F. I've never seen anything like that for consecutive nights at a time! Check out this video we posted to FACEBOOK to see the ice mosaics on our plastic. We caught a handful of heater malfunctions just in the nick of time, and frozen water lines were a daily challenge for us, but overall we pulled through.

Farming isn't for the faint of heart, especially in northern climates like Michigan. The next time someone tells me they want to open a greenhouse when they retire, I'm going to tell them this story. On the surface, flower farming is incredibly romantic, but we're a gritty, resilient bunch who aren't afraid to get dirty. And you have to be! It's not the life of leisure that folks want it to be—especially when we're up every four hours checking greenhouses for nights on end.

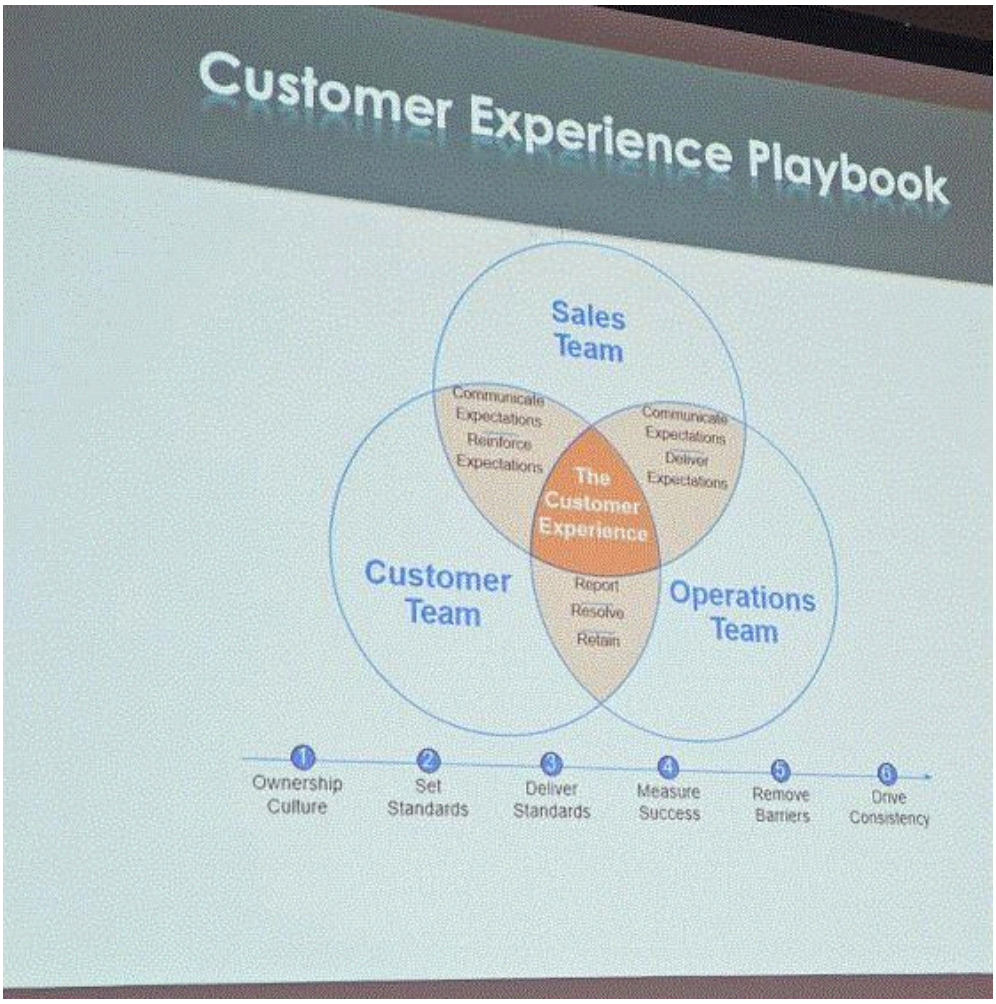
How did you farm fare the last two weeks? Tater and I would love to hear from you. Drop us a line HERE.

In this edition of *Bloom Beat,* we've got a lot of ground to cover, including webinars, Cultivate'26, customer service and more.

With all that being said, let's talk shop!



John Kennedy on Delivering a Consistent Customer Experience



According to John, all teams in your operation must work together to deliver a positive customer experience.

Last month, I had the pleasure of listening to a few presentations by well-known consultant John Kennedy. His talk on customer service was by far my favorite. John specializes in strategic planning, benchmarking and creating positive company cultures. He has worked with major brands including General Electric, ExxonMobil and even the U.S. Air Force. And he is well-versed in the green industry. He's energetic and dynamic, and if you attend a conference where he's presenting, I highly recommend you sit in on one of his talks.

According to John, your brand is just as important as the products you sell. The price you charge is nowhere near as important as the experience you deliver. Technology and AI are changing the consumer landscape dramatically, but the customer experience has been dynamic since the first stores ever opened.

According to John, in the early days of marketing, the approach was strictly based on pricing. Price was the deciding factor as to whether a customer bought a product from you or from someone else. Fast competitors would slash prices, and sales were the motivating factor that influenced consumer purchasing.

Fast forward to modern-day purchasing decisions, where consumers are shopping for more than just a low price. They want an experience. The experience economy starts with your website and your Google business listing. Remember, you never get a second chance at a first impression. Your website can lead to a customer phone call (another touch point) and can potentially lead to a visit to your business.

There are plenty of opportunities for you to provide a customer experience with this digital pipeline (both good and bad). And like it or not, technology is a part of this experience economy.

Consumers are brand-conscious, and wherever your brand is present, consumers are judging you. For instance, if your branded farm vehicle cuts someone off in traffic, that leaves an impression.

According to John, “The day it becomes difficult to do business with us is the day consumers stop doing business with us. Consumer expectations are only going to get more demanding.” Which is why it is important now more than ever to make sure that customers have the comfort and reassurance of knowing that you will have the product they are looking to purchase when they come to your farm.

Enter the **convenience economy**. It’s no wonder consumers trust Amazon with their everyday needs, because the inventory is precise, shipping is predictable and fast, and consumers have incredible confidence that Amazon will meet their expectations every purchase. They have set the bar high, and green industry businesses need to strive to meet this standard in order to stay viable.

John discussed independent garden centers drop-shipping plants to consumers from their suppliers. Willoway Nursery in Ohio is a great example of this. Replicating the Amazon experience allows green industry businesses to capture the sale immediately even if the inventory isn’t available at the garden center that day. This is called the "endless aisle" model.

Most consumers will even pay more for quality service and guaranteed availability of the products they are looking for. Let’s face it, no one wants to drive all way the way to your farm only to find out you are sold out of ranunculus. Pricing is no longer the sole motivation for purchasing; experience and convenience are paramount.

Below are five steps that all farm businesses can take to drive a positive customer experience. According to John, you can charge a premium price if you can offer the perfect product, delivered by a friendly, caring person, in a timely manner, with world-class problem resolution.

- Ownership culture. Make sure every employee in your business understand the part they play in the experience the customer is going to have. If this is lacking in your business, start training your employees now. In John's experience, it takes at least six months to achieve this.

- Set Standards. Have a timeframe in place for response times to customer inquiries. Example: wedding proposals are back to clients within 72 hours. Time kills all deals, so this is important. Set standards for customer touch points, too, such as greeting every customer as soon as they come in the door.

- Deliver Standards. Train your team to deliver the standards you set, and strive for five-star online reviews. Even encourage your customers to give you feedback when something is lacking.

- Measure success. Track the standards you set, and train your team to assess speed, accuracy and customer satisfaction.

- Begin with the End in Mind. When it comes to crafting your standards, start from the end result you want your customers to experience, and work backwards from there on how to deliver it.



Meet SAF's Floral Chatbot, Aster

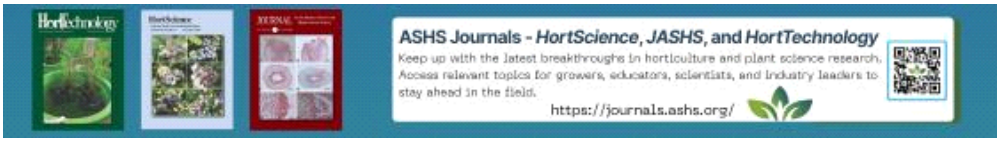
Last month, the Society of American Florists launched their AI Floral Business consultant called Aster. Members of SAF can ask Aster questions about the floral industry and for tips for improving business operations.

According to SAF President Lori Wheat, “Aster is like having an experienced floral business advisor in your pocket. Florists are busy running shops, managing teams and serving customers. This tool helps them make confident decisions faster, using guidance that’s rooted in the realities of the floral industry. I encourage every member to try it.”

Aster is versed in SAF’s extensive library of trusted industry resources and educational courses. As a result, you can trust Aster’s answers. Aster is designed to save time, reduce stress and support smarter decision making across every area of a floral business.

"Aster understands our industry because it's built on our industry," says Joe Aldeguer, SAF's director of IT, who led the development and training of the chatbot. "We didn't want to create something that just sounded smart. We wanted something that's genuinely helpful—a tool members can rely on for practical guidance that aligns with SAF's expertise and values."

For more information about SAF and how to become a member, click HERE.



Webinars Galore!

Winter is a great time for training your employees and brushing up on some critical skills. Below are a few webinars to put on your calendar. I am especially excited for perennials webinar by our friends at Walters Gardens and hosted by
bossman Chris Beytes. Read on for more info!

Hottest New Perennials of 2026 (and a Sneak Peek at 2027 Standouts)
Thursday March 12, 1pm EST

Expand your knowledge and expertise in growing Proven Winners Perennials with this in-depth webinar. Walters Gardens Regional Product Manager Laura Robles will review 15 of the hottest new perennials available at retail in 2026. And as a bonus, she’ll give you an early look at 15 standout varieties Walters is planning to introduce for 2027. This live online session will delivering practical insights, best practices and growing tips to help optimize plant performance and elevate your perennial program. I’m sure there will be stunning selections for us cut flower growers too!

Our guest expert, Laura Robles, is a Regional Product Manager for Walters Gardens in Zeeland, Michigan. She oversees sales in the Northeast and manages the trialing program sent out to customers. Thank you Walters Gardens for sponsoring this webinar.

Register HERE.

University of Florida Online Greenhouse Training

Check out the new online courses offered through the University of Florida. All courses are online and taught by distinguished professors from across the country. Subjects include Nutrient Management 1, Practical Disease Management, Climate Management, Greenhouse & Nursery 101, Substrates for Container-Grown Plants, Cutting and Stock Plant Management and much more. There are introductory, intermediate and advanced levels of curriculum. Courses can be combined to complete various professional certificates, too!

New courses this year include “Cuttings and Stock Plant Management” by Dr. Jim Faust (Clemson University) and Dr. John Dolce (North Carolina State University), and “Plant Growth Regulators” by Ohio State University’s Dr. Garrett Owen.

Each course is completely online and two new modules are added each week over a four-week period for a total of eight modules. The best part is, classes cater to a wide range of experience levels and are taught in both English and Spanish. There is class for everyone!

Register HERE.

UConn Extension Webinars for Spanish-Speaking Workers

The University of Connecticut has a four-part webinar series catered to Spanish-speaking workers in the green industry. Webinars are on Fridays at noon EST through the month of February. Topics include irrigation management, pest and disease monitoring and occupational health. The webinars are completely free, but registration is required.

You can find the link HERE.

Pre-Registration for Cultivate



This month, you can pre-register for Cultivate! Pre-registration opens February 9 and closes February 20. With pre-registration, not only do you get to start planning early, but you also get the best selection of hotel rooms and rates. I’m excited to go this year; we’re lucky to be so close to Columbus. But it’s well worth the trip even if you don’t live in the Midwest.

For those of you unfamiliar with Cultivate, it’s the largest green industry trade show and conference in North America. The show has more than 650 exhibitors, more than 100 educational sessions, and great production tours for attendees. It’s also a great way to connect with suppliers and get a lot of business done in a few days. And seeing your favorite green industry friends from all over the country is a fringe benefit!

You can see the full line up and schedule HERE.

Be sure to mark your calendar for July 11-14. And if you are headed to Columbus, please DROP

ME A LINE. I would love to connect with you!

Stay Warm!



Lindsay Daschner (and Tater)
Editor-at-Large—*Bloom Beat*
Owner—Forget-Me-Not Farms

This email was received by 6,208 of your fellow fresh-cut flower growers!

If you're interested in advertising in *Bloom Beat*, contact **Kim Brown** and she will hook you up!

