

# GROWERTALKS

## Growers Talk Business

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### Spring Trials: What Does the Industry Need?

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I'm probably going to hit a few nerves on this article, but that's not my intention—I want to create a dialogue to make things better. In any business, the key to success is knowing what your customers need and adapting as they change.

One of the things that hasn't changed (except for the name) is the California Spring Trials. Yes, they updated the name. Yes, certain breeders change locations. Yes, Benary will always have something that's a bit edgy. But the event itself is still executed in very much the same manner and timing as it was 30 years ago. We all get in vehicles and roll up the coast to see the new introductions. Each breeder prepares for weeks to get ready for that one-hour stop by a prospective customer. Multiple groups spend time, energy and money to plan out

their trip to hit as many spots as possible. We all walk away with tons of pictures and notes based on what we saw. And, I would dare say, that the time and energy is well spent, as we come back with ideas and program expansions to help grow our business.

But what we also come back with each year is the disdain from missing a week in spring. We also come back with the sense we didn't listen to every presentation to its fullest, as we were checking our phones for buyer emails, store issues and garden center needs.

For some folks, they don't send their full teams out to the trials due to other commitments. This is our Christmastime and our time is probably best spent at our facilities in executing the most important days of our year. Everyone knows this, everyone talks about it, but for some reason, Spring Trials happens around the same time each year. What would most of the industry like to see? I'm not 100% sure, but doing Spring Trials earlier in spring would seem to be very helpful.

There are tons of reasons for this. First, I would assume the most vital thing that any trials or show wants is to have more people attend. More people means more sales opportunities. Second, it allows for earlier

commitments, which would be very helpful to the breeders and everyone in the supply chain. Third, the focus of the audience would be much better, which probably would lead to better discussions.

What are the drawbacks? First, I hear that the breeders cannot get the product ready in time. But I think there are groups that travel out to see the breeders at other times of the year and somehow the product is ready for those events in February. So, while a valid argument, I would argue this isn't a deal breaker.

Second, I hear "it's tradition" to have it during April. Well, innovation is the cool cousin of tradition and we haven't allowed other traditions in our industry to get in the way of progress.

Third, it's well attended, so why change it? You cannot show new varieties in PowerPoint or on email; you have to see it to help build your programs and commit to the product. But it seems we can find a better date.

We've talked about this on a number of occasions, but we always say things like, "I don't know who decides that." This isn't the presidential election and we're not picking delegates, so it shouldn't be difficult to find out who makes these decisions and request a change. Or, for those who work with the bigger retailers, it might be time to ask them to investigate this and provide input, as those are large groups of people who the breeders want to attend.

This is Spring Trials and it should happen right before spring. Somewhere between February 25 and March 15 seems most natural and wouldn't interfere with the other industry events already out there (i.e., TPIE, IPM, etc.).

*GrowerTalks* gave me a forum with this article and I'm using this article as an open letter to anyone who'll listen on this issue and provide input to those making the decisions. While it seems we're only talking a simple date change, I know there's enough industry angst on this issue that it needs to be brought up. Forward this article to those who make these decisions. **GT**

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