

GROWERTALKS

Young Voices

11/1/2018

An Internship with Opportunities ... Minus the Mayo

Coralie Farinas



This is a tale of how recognizing opportunities and embracing chances can lead you down unexpected and fabulous paths. After getting an Associate Degree in Horticulture Production from a university in France, I saw an advertisement for the Ohio State University Program, in which you pursue a year-long internship in the United States. Looking for professional experience, I contacted the program coordinator, Greg Lecki, who suggested an internship at Timbuk Farms in Granville, Ohio.

Pictured: Coralie Farinas next to the phlox she's currently working on at the Ornamental Plant Germplasm Center at The Ohio State University.

A few months later, and despite my broken English, the Timbuk team welcomed me and guided me through their flowering plants production operations. I was quickly trained and able to contribute. My tasks varied from general greenhouse maintenance to insect pest management evaluation on crops and soil conductivity assessment.

But I learned about far more than horticulture! So often hard work does not only teach us about the topic at hand, but about the people around us. I learned much about the American culture—a world quite different from France. Indeed, I learned about many other cultures, as I shared in the experience with four other interns, including two Indonesians, a Brazilian and a Ukrainian!

Everything was new for us. Something as simple as ordering pizza became an adventure—issues in translation once brought the lot of us to stare (in a state of total confusion) at a pizza covered in mayo and lettuce! Also new, was our introduction to the automatic poinsettia boom irrigation system—which, by the way, we had to “babysit” for a whole month to avoid after-hours unfortunate stops that would ruin the fresh cuttings.

We were also provided with all sorts of extracurricular activities aimed to foster our professional lives, including the chance to attend the AmericanHort trade show, Cultivate, the annual and national rendezvous of members of the green industry!

In short, this internship gave me practical experience in one of the highest tech countries in the world, and also a

profoundly human experience. While an intern, I got to develop real friendships and I am always happy to hear about them, wherever they are in the world.

But it didn't quite stop there. This experience opened up options for my career that I never knew I had. While learning about the horticulture production systems and operation management, I also learned about the American culture and its school system. I learned how I could succeed, even though I didn't have the right credentials at the time.

Additionally, practical experience helped me realize ways to apply scientific research to improve the production system.

I went on to complete my bachelor's degree in France and then used all I learned about the American university system to apply for a Ph.D. in Plant Pathology at The Ohio State University. I am now a scientist in training and, because of my practical experiences as an intern, I want to provide solutions to problems that the industry is facing.

In the ornamental lab of Dr. Francesca Peduto Hand, among others, we developed the first ornamental disease reports in Ohio, provide growers with management strategies and help testing the efficacy of fungicides. With the help of Dr. Pablo Jourdan, director of the Ornamental Plant Germplasm Center (OPGC), we are also characterizing the phlox germplasm by identifying tolerant plant species to the powdery mildew disease.

Six years after my first AmericanHort tradeshow (OFA at the time), I went back to Cultivate'18 as a Hort Scholar. What a great reunion it provided with the Ohio Program team and the new interns! We went on a kayaking trip on the Big Darby Creek—that was quite a spectacle for the riparians, witnesses to our laughter, a.k.a. the international language, as we splashed water at each other and collided (mostly by accident).

I was sure to tell whomever I met, "This internship doesn't stop after your year is up." You have a chance to shape it into something bigger than yourself and it offers an eye-opener on career options in your many, many years to come.

After many years, my once-broken English and timidity have come around! I have grown, adapted and now I even accept that my meals will most certainly contain mayo. **GT**

Originally from France, Coralie Farinas is currently earning her Ph.D. at The Ohio State University.