

GROWERTALKS

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Chris Beytes

On poinsettias

You guys have a love/hate relationship with poinsettias. You hate growing them, but you love talking about them. Here's some of the feedback I got from last week's questions about production and profitability:

We are growing "more" in regard to square feet devoted, but less in regard to numbers of units. Our smaller sizes have decreased slightly in quantity produced, and our larger sizes are increasing. We do garner better-than-average prices for our plants; however, we are not a "volume" grower.

-Joe Boarini, Grande Greenhouses, Indianapolis

We're growing about 10% more. We're growing more in all sizes-4 in., 6 in., 8 in. and 10 in. We grow a few from cuttings and a significant amount from prefinished material. Fifty to sixty percent of our market is churches and a few fundraisers. We're actually seeing the market increase in our area. Three small local growers that supplied the churches and fundraisers have stopped growing poinsettias. Perhaps Dane County, Wisconsin is unique. In the last 10 years Jung's closed one store. One additional major garden center store closed. Six small retail greenhouse operations have closed. Two have started. Three K-marts have closed. Four Wal-Marts have opened. Two Home Depots have opened. Only two retail greenhouse operations have grown significantly in the last few years. Luckily, we're one of them.

-Edward Knapton, America's Best Flowers Garden Center, Cottage Grove, Wisconsin

(I like how much Edward has studied his market's growth and decline. Every businessperson should know this information.)

And one mass merchant grower wrote, in part:

I've heard that some growers are now leveraging the poinsettia production costs into their spring/summer/fall programs in order to continue to lower their [poinsettia] selling price to the boxes. A few brave growers have stopped producing the crop altogether because of the negative returns on production, but that's not the trend, since such a stance by a producer can damage the relationship with the boxes that have to sell this product in December. The boxes hold the lion's share of the blame for this disparity, as they beat each other up trying to attract people into their garden centers. Their need to sell for less and still make a profit has been a tenuous path at best, and one I believe will ultimately force a correction.

Regarding leveraging poinsettia costs into your spring costs, I don't see anything wrong with that. Many growers tell me they sell certain items at a loss in order to meet a customer's needs. But to make up for that, they have other

items they sell at much higher margins. It's a careful balance that requires accurate accounting practices.

First tribulations, now trials ... and clinics

Speaking of poinsettias, it's trial time. Along with the National Poinsettia Cultivar Trials at Purdue, NCSU and Florida (www.poinsettia-trial.org), there's also Westcan Greenhouse in Langley, BC, Canada, November 16. Westcan is the Northwest's leading trial. E-mail Eric Voogt at westcangrns@shaw.ca for info. For those of you in New England, Pleasant View Gardens in Loudon, New Hampshire, is hosting its first poinsettia workshop and trials, November 20-December 1. Harvey Lang from Fischer USA and Dr. Paul Fisher from the University of New Hampshire will be reviewing the crops. E-mail Carol Huntington at carolh@pvg.com.

And for those of you thinking ahead to spring, plan on attending one of PanAmerican Seed's "Ride the Wave" Grower Clinics. You can pick up culture and marketing tips to boost the sales of your Wave program. The Wave experts will be in Tualatin, Oregon, November 2; Gilroy, California, November 3; Irvine, California, November 4; Charlotte, North Carolina, November 10; Atlanta, November 15; and in New England at a date to be determined. E-mail Laurence Pallez at lpallez@panamseed.com to RSVP.

Late-breaking ralstonia news

We've gotten word through NAPPO (the North American Plant Protection Organization) that there's been a new case of *Ralstonia solanacearum* race 3, biovar 2 on geraniums-this time in a Quincy, Florida, greenhouse.

According to USDA Public Affairs spokesperson Claude Knighten, inspectors quarantined the nursery, ordered the destruction of all 1,500 geraniums on the property and supervised a full sanitation of the facility. USDA says none of the geraniums or other plants from the nursery were shipped outside of Florida.

Unlike previous cases, the USDA wouldn't disclose the specific variety or varieties that were infected or destroyed. Claude explained that the USDA's policy is not to disclose the names of businesses affected by diseases or quarantines, and that revealing the variety names could link the disease to a specific breeding company.

The geraniums have been traced back to Mexico, but the USDA emphasized that it's unclear if Mexico is the source of the infection, because water samples from a retention pond at the nursery also tested positive for *ralstonia* r3b2. That raises the question of as to whether the pond water could have infected the geraniums, rather than the other way around, in which case the USDA is facing the question of how the disease came to be in the pond, as well as where else in the surrounding area the disease might be.

Scientists are conducting additional tests to determine the extent of the infection, and Plant Protection and Quarantine has put together a science panel to evaluate potential testing and mitigation measures.

Not quite done with fall

Okay, a couple last comments on the fall season. First, I saw a good display of Fall Magic planters at Home Depot on Sunday, grown (I believe) by Henry Mast Greenhouses. Nice quality, 12-in bowls were \$14.96. Plenty of fall colors, but some had too much pink and light blue in them for the tastes of one female customer I talked to. And at least one reader, Michelle Donovan, from Ulery Greenhouses in Ohio, agrees:

Good info and observations on fall containers. I agree that fall colors are what inspire us (women) to decorate for the season-pink isn't going to cut it.

But then there's this e-mail, from Marty Reichenberger, of Green Thumb Greenhouse in Kansas:

Couldn't help to comment on something regarding fall color. I am a wholesaler only. Years past, our pansy sales

were 75% reds, yellows and oranges. This year I'm totally out of blues, purples and mixes. I found the same thing in mums this year-usually have plenty of pinks and purples, but this year I have been out all season. Seems like retail customers, at least in the Kansas/Oklahoma markets, are looking for brighter, spring colors this fall.

I asked Michelle Donovan for her take on this phenomenon. She replied that purples and blues are fall fashion colors -so it pays to pay attention to what's happening in the department stores.

Help for hurricane victims

Speaking of Florida, the FNGLA says that President Bush and the USDA have devoted funding to assist growers hit by the hurricanes. Beginning October 26, affected nursery owners can sign up to receive up to 25% of their crop inventory loss (up to \$80,000 maximum), plus \$250 per acre for general cleanup costs. Go to www.fn gla.org or e-mail info@fn gla.org.

See you next time,

Chris

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GrowerTalks