

# GROWERTALKS

## Features

8/28/2013

## 7 Rooting Stations, 7 Ideas

*Jennifer Zurko*

**Doug Cole**

**D.S. Cole Growers Loudon, New Hampshire**

**Rooted cuttings handled per year: 7 million**

One thing that we did a few years back is tighten up our procedures for receiving cuttings. When unrooted cuttings arrive, we count all the product, separate the cuttings as needed and then put most varieties in the cooler until they're stuck in trays. Although this is not an unusual practice, how we treat any problem issues was greatly improved last year. We were finding that, on occasion, when a plant variety had a problem, either on day one or somewhere along the way, the process of recording the problem could slip through the cracks. We worked with a company involved with lean flow practices and dissected our procedures with regards to quality control and rebuilt the entire process. We now have strict procedures where any issue that's even questionable is brought to the attention of our QC person immediately. That person then records all the data, which includes taking photos. If the problem has even the slightest possibility of involving our cutting supplier, the data and photos are sent to the supplier right away.

If down the road the problem did, in fact, involve the supplier, we're now all on the same page due to timely notification.

By doing this, there's never the concern from the supplier whether or not the problem occurred upon the URC's arrival or three weeks later. This also gives the supplier the benefit of being able to check their mother stock or their procedures to avoid more problems.

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**Bob Dickman**

**Dickman Farms Auburn, New York**

**Rooted cuttings handled per year: 8 million**

I'm big on people management and getting the most out of our labor dollar. We consolidated all of our material handling processes down to one main area for this coming sticking season. All of our employees from sticking line associates, patch and repair people—as well as pinching—all work in one location. We're able to manage all the processes with one

manager in one location. This helps with labor control and output of every employee.

An easy way to manage all of the processes is through a production board that every employee checks every day (see photo). For sticking line people, they have assigned seats, as well as spelled-out instructions of what needs to get accomplished. These people can then clock in and move to their stations before the start of the workday. The board identifies who the line supervisor is and the production goal for that day. We also use the board to pass information. This process keeps everyone on track and shows where they need to report every day. I assign one person to fill out the board with management each morning before the start of the workday.

**April Herring**

**Pacific Plug & Liner Watsonville, California**

**Rooted cuttings handled per year: 15 million**

One thing we are doing well is a new way of handling dianthus cuttings when we use our own stock. We pre-chill the cuttings for around 48 hours in our cooler. Our head grower Erin Giffin says this has helped cut disease by 90%.

**Ron Sant**

**George Sant & Sons Kleinburg, Ontario**

**Rooted cuttings handled per year: 8 million**

We made two changes in the last two to three years in propagation. The first is we are lighting as much as possible—especially on the more difficult things to propagate for 50% to 75% of the crop time.

The other is we are using 50 ppm of fertilizer right from the start during misting.

**Randy Tagawa**

**Tagawa Greenhouse Brighton, Colorado**

**Rooted cuttings handled per year: 18 million**

We all recognize that a few varieties of unrooted cuttings do not travel well. We have developed stock programs in our Colorado and New Mexico locations where we have high light during the winter months to produce quality stock plants. We cut and stick our cuttings within the same day to improve the rooting and quality of our liners.

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**Jim Gibson****Timbuk II Plant Company Granville, Ohio****Rooted cuttings handled per year: 12 million**

We just finished our scanning upgrade to our sticking line, partnering with SBI Software. We now scan everything off of the sticking line, including who stuck the product and which product was stuck. This also counts the product, so we don't do any hand counting. Here's the process in a nutshell:

- A production plan is entered in the SBI production management software and users print labels
- The labels are put on trays as planted along with an employee ID label
- As trays go down the production line, the tray label and employee label are scanned, recording the item as live inventory
- The employee gets credit for the planting so Jim pays the reward to the employee
- Users scan trays on the table from the sticking line into an iPad (Inventory control is done on the iPad through the life of the plant on the farm)
- All of the tables are movable, which helps with consolidation
- The trays are scanned as orders during the shipping process
- Summaries of all of this activity can be looked up on phones, tablets or a desktop computer through a mobile plug-in
- A daily email goes out summarizing all of the activity and where production is late, over or other issues, along with an Excel file that has detailed lists of activity

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**Walter Gravagna****Van de Wetering Greenhouses Jamesport, New York****Rooted cuttings handled per year: 6 to 7 million**

Our biggest labor costs are the employees dedicated to sticking. The problem arises when there aren't any cuttings to stick or the cuttings haven't arrived and our employees (sometimes 60 to 70) need something to do. We were always waiting for FedEx or UPS to deliver and they would always have to find busy work until the boxes showed up. We started calculating the dollars lost on labor while waiting for work and we realized something had to change.

We were able to convince our URC suppliers to cut and ship on Thursday or Friday. This was off peak during their week and they were able to keep their harvesting crews busy. By shipping Thursday or Friday this guaranteed arrival Saturday morning to our local FedEx facility. We have them hold the cuttings there and a driver from our company picks them up. We have all of our sticking labor start on Saturday at noon and they work until 8:00 p.m. and all day Sunday. In the past, we would have cuttings coming in Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, whereas now most of our cuttings have been stuck by Monday morning. Also, our sticking crews are only sticking cuttings and when there's nothing left to stick, their jobs are done for the week. **GT**