

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Cultivate'14 Recap: Out With the Old, In With the New

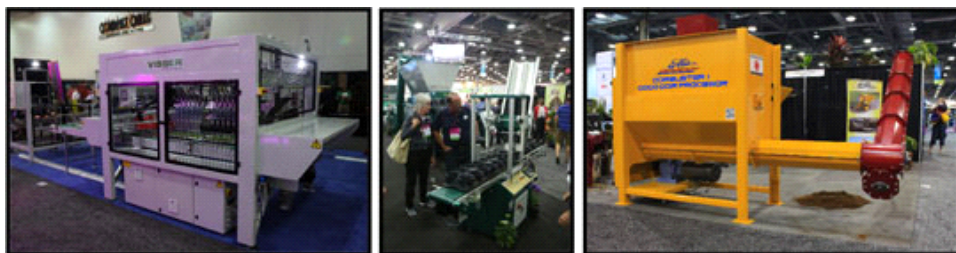
Chris Beytes, Ellen C. Wells, Jennifer Zurko & Jennifer Polanz

For those of you who missed this year's Cultivate (formerly known as OFA Short Course) in Columbus, Ohio, you were one of the few. AmericanHort announced that this year's show had the most attendees in more than a decade, with more than 10,000 people from 20-plus countries walking the trade show aisles, attending sessions and taking over the local restaurants and bars.

But if you couldn't make it, don't fret. Your four faithful scribes of Ball Publishing divided and conquered to find the newest products and technology on the trade show floor, along with listening in to some of the sessions that have people "buzzing."

Also for the first time this year, there was a Retail Terrace with 50,000 sq. ft. of retail-focused vendors. Flip to *Green Profit* to read more about it.

Machines, automation & technology



Fast transplanting

Designed for small or medium operations, Visser Horti System's PC31 Greenline is a fast, flexible transplanter with six to 12 grippers that'll do flats, pots or baskets. Did we say fast? The new servos, designed especially for this machine, will handle 1,500 plugs per hour per gripper (1,000 used to be standard). That's 18,000 plugs per hour for the 12 gripper unit. Cost is \$98,000. Also, note Visser's new corporate color scheme and welded steel frame (instead of aluminum extrusion).

Efficient pot dispensing and filling

Bouldin & Lawson showed a pair of new pot dispensers. One is designed for hanging baskets and large pots, such as for garden mums. It uses a screw mechanism to separate the pots. The other (pictured) is for smaller pots going into shuttle trays; it uses a trick cam mechanism to pop a pair of pots loose while holding the next pair in line. It'll fill 1,000 shuttle trays per hour. Price is \$14,850. B&L also showed the new 133FX Flat Filler that's designed for increased precision while greatly reducing the amount of metal-to-metal contact and resulting wear and tear in the soil return system.

Busting coir bales

Ellis Products offers a new machine for breaking up coconut coir bricks, bales and slabs. The aptly named Coirbuster can break apart coir products with compression ratios of 4:1 up to 10:1 at a rate of up to four metric tons (8,800 lbs.) per hour, yet does so gently, without damaging the fibers, by rubbing the coir apart. Water is added when the coir exits the machine.



Big ULV sprayer

Dramm's new TracFOG is the company's largest ULV (ultra low volume) sprayer. It works on a tractor three-point hitch, powered by the power take off (PTO). Developed for the forestry industry in Brazil, it's perfect for large greenhouse ranges with wide aisles. You just suit up, drive through at 1 to 2 mph and treat an acre in 10 minutes or so. The tank holds 100 gal. of spray and will cover 2 million sq. ft. Price is \$27,000.

Nine new machines at AgriNomix

That was our count of the new technology highlights at the AgriNomix display at the far back left corner of the Columbus Convention Center. It might have been more! New offerings include a \$20,000 two-sided stick-on label applicator; the KV-XL filler that is designed specifically for greatly improved return of soil that doesn't make it into the flats/pots; the RW 2100 Transplanter—a monster of a machine with 72 grippers on twin beams (38 grippers used to be their max) that will plant 1,700 flats per hour; the Lambda Drum Seeder with up to three drums, which allows you to sow one lot of seed while setting up for the next lot, reducing down time; and a pair of new machines for applying Mylar wrap and sleeves. Whew!

iPad-style Environmental Control

Wadsworth Control Systems introduced "Seed," the first full touch-screen environmental control unit on the market. When we say touch screen, we mean iPad-style sliding screens. It's loaded with features, including more curtain settings and temperature set points than older controllers and much more. And it's easy to figure out—just like a smartphone or tablet. That's Amanda Debevc showing it off.



TrueLeaf now BioTherm (again)

TrueLeaf started out under the name BioTherm and that's who they are once again. The greenhouse heating and cooling company is going to focus on those two core competencies, they say, and the name change reflects that. They're also going into livestock and workspace climate control. TrueLeaf isn't gone, however; it will remain as the firm's consultancy, design and engineering division.

RIO Software from FlowVision

RIO stands for Rack Item Optimizer because its main purpose is to help growers assemble their shipping racks based on the most optimized configuration. It works with any type of rack (custom or from a supplier), telling you which product should go on which shelf of the rack. It'll also tell you the order the racks should go on the truck based on the drops. Not only does it make the shipping area more efficient and increases payload by minimizing air in the racks, it creates an output for your logistics team to build their loads based on the number of racks needed. It will have the ability for the dock to scan a barcode on the rack sheet and send the information (items on rack) to the customer before the product even gets there. It also creates master pull sheets for your plants and tags based on what is being shipped. www.flowvision.com

Seeder for microgreens

Capitalizing on the microgreens trend, Graham Goodenough, proprietor at Seederman Seeders, has introduced a seeder designed for high-volume precision broadcast sowing of microgreen trays. It's called, aptly enough, The Broadcaster.

Alternative to polycarbonate and poly

Adaptive Plastic's Solexx covering is a flexible, bendable greenhouse covering that offers improved energy savings compared with other glazing. Made of high-density polyethylene, it comes in a 5 mm twin-wall configuration that offers an R-value of 2.3 (compared with 1.6 for 8 mm twin-wall polycarbonate and 1.7 for double poly, according to available comparison charts) or a 3.5 mm twin wall. The product, which produces 100% diffused light, comes in rolls of up to 900 ft. long. And it's made in the USA. That's new COO Blair Busenbark showing off the toughness of Solexx versus poly film.

Hot Topic Sessions

Neonics & Bees

The hottest of the hot topics at this year's Cultivate were neonicotinoids and their impact on bees. There were at least seven different sessions where the sole focus was on this issue that's been on everyone's minds.

Recent legislation in Minnesota and Home Depot's decision to require their growers to label the plants that are treated with neonicotinoids have many growers extremely concerned—and it was obvious with how well-attended these sessions were. As Rick Fletcher, technical services manager for Nufarm, said, "Our industry

isn't used to defending itself" and it's making everyone nervous.

The first thing people asked was: Is there a replacement? The answer is yes ... and no. Carlos Bográn of OHP—who was the first company to introduce neonicotinoids in the 1990s—said that they do have other types of pesticides, but there is no one true replacement for neonics because most only control one type of insect. It would force growers to use a myriad of chemicals that require more applications. For example, you'd be spraying for aphids this week and then whiteflies the next and the cycle would continue throughout the production cycle, said Rick.

Also, the method of applying these is different. Growers will be finding themselves spraying instead of using drenches, which puts beneficial insects at risk.

As many experts and scientists have said before, the science says that there's no direct link between neonics and Colony Collapse Disorder, said Carlos. And he even mentioned a small study that found pollinators aren't even attracted to plants that have been treated with neonics, although Carlos admitted that this is hard to prove on a large scale. We do know that traces of neonics have been found in the pollen and nectar—by design, that's what we want the neonics to do, said Rick. But the question is how much?

If you took anything away from these sessions, the answer to that question is we don't really know. So during his session on regulatory issues, AmericanHort's Joe Bischoff announced that they're partnering with the Horticultural Research Institute, the Society of American Florists and the American Floral Endowment to develop the Bee and Pollinator Stewardship Initiative and raise funds to conduct the research needed so that our industry has the knowledge to find a solution to this issue. You can learn more about the stewardship program on www.americanhort.org.

Along the same lines, Carl Kroon, general manager of the Las Mercedes, El Salvador production facility for Dümmen Group, announced it would no longer be using neonicotinoids for spring annuals production.

The declaration came during a celebratory announcement Sunday morning at Cultivate for Las Mercedes' MPS certification. "We are consumer driven," he explained, saying the topic was a public discussion that can't be won. "If they don't want neonics, we won't do it."

In lieu of using the neonics, the production facility in El Salvador will instead step up its biological controls program and utilizes extensive scouting measures to ensure clean material. This will be combined with an adjusted spray program with products not containing neonicotinoids at minimal levels with additional treatments only in hotspots, Carl said. They're looking into new spray technology to reduce the amount of chemicals used overall.

Although some growers, retailers and breeders have announced that they're decreasing or eliminating neonics from their greenhouses and garden centers, many feel that it would be a detriment to our industry if we're forced to pull them from our toolbox.

"An all-out ban is not going to help with pollinator health," said Carlos. "If we let emotions dictate what we do, we'll be in trouble."

Healthcare

This issue has taken a bit of a backseat because of the kerfuffle over neonics, but all business owners are concerned about complying with the Affordable Care Act (ACA) laws. Digital Insurance has partnered with Hortica to help growers and retailers deal with the compliance surrounding the new law. Digital Insurance's Wayne Mertel held a session about the ins and outs of the ACA.

Wayne spoke about the good things that have come from the ACA—including the removal of preexisting conditions and 100% coverage for preventative and wellness care—but our industry will still struggle with certain aspects of the law, including offering coverage if you have more than 100 full-time employees, especially since the definition of “full time” continues to be debated. There have been new developments with regard to seasonal full-time employees with the new Simplifying Technical Aspects Regarding Seasonality (STARS) bill that was introduced at the end of July. (Keep an eye on the Washington Impact section of AmericanHort's website and SAF: In the Lobby in this magazine every month for updates.)

Wayne said that it's been pretty quiet lately because it's an election year. But after November, there could be some potential changes to the ACA, including eliminating the employer mandate and the tax deductions for offering benefits.

The one thing Wayne discussed was brand new plans for employers to offer their staff that cost as little as \$125 a month. Called “Skinny Plans” by The Wall Street Journal, there are now two plans (one that's \$125 per month and one that's \$200 per month) that will provide essential, but basic, benefits for your employees while complying with the law. These plans don't offer great coverage if you're hospitalized, but most people get their care through outpatient services like office and immediate care visits anyway. They have a relatively low co-pay and a good drug program, too, but if you're hospitalized, you'll need supplemental insurance.

Which seems to be the way things are going when it comes to health insurance coverage. Wayne said that most employers have been over-insuring their staff for years and in time, everyone will have a \$5,000 deductible for hospitalizations. Because of this, instead of the old model of one sole medical plan, all of us will eventually have more of an integrated “bundle” with other plans to supplement our main plan for hospitalizations and accidents.

Immigration

Craig Regelbrugge, who's in charge of industry advocacy for AmericanHort, gave us an update on what's going on with the current immigration situation. A few things of note:

- The Senate passed a comprehensive immigration reform bill a year ago, but it failed to pass in the House. Since then, the House has considered pieces of the bill.
- House Republicans are mostly responsible for the obstacles with trying to pass a bill, but some Democrats say they won't vote for any bill unless it includes a path to citizenship—a fact that remains very contentious between both sides.
- Nothing will probably happen until after the elections in November, so in the meantime, AmericanHort's strategies are to continue to press for legislative action and defend the existing H-2A and H-2B guest worker programs.

“I'm optimistic that this country will solve this problem,” said Craig. “It's just a question of when.”

During his presentation, Craig mentioned an op-ed piece that was in *The New York Times* on July 10 written by Bill Gates, Warren Buffett and Sheldon Adelson. The three richest men in the country talked about how the failure of Congress to pass immigration reform has weakened the economy and the morale of the American people.

“The current stalemate—in which greater pride is attached to thwarting the opposition than to advancing the nation’s interests—is depressing to most Americans and virtually all of its business managers. The impasse certainly depresses the three of us.”

“The House Republicans vilified the Senate bill before they even studied it,” said Craig. “And that was their biggest mistake.”

Special Announcements

Sakata Seed America announced at Cultivate '14 that it has signed an agreement with cyclamen expert Schoneveld Breeding for the sales and distribution in the U.S., Canada and Mexico of certain Schoneveld cyclamen genetics. The agreement was effective immediately.

Dave Armstrong, president and CEO of Sakata Seed America, said at the announcement that while the company remains focused on its proprietary products, it saw an opportunity to leverage an exclusive platform and to develop the market for Schoneveld’s genetics.

Peter van de Pol, owner and president of Schoneveld Breeding, added that his company contributes more than just breeding and seed to the market. Schoneveld “found the right company in Sakata Seed America” to help develop the North American market for their lines of cyclamen genetics, stated Peter. Also, Peter says Schoneveld continues to focus on cool-tolerant cyclamen varieties that produce quickly and have a long shelf life, characteristics that are important in this North American market.

Sakata Seed America will begin selling and distributing initially with six of Schoneveld’s cyclamen series. Those lines are the Verano (mini), Picasso (mini silver leaf), Allure (intermediate), Rembrandt (intermediate silver leaf), XL (standard) and Mammoth (jumbo).

A press release distributed at the announcement further states Dave Armstrong’s view on the collaboration: “This partnership enhances our ability to offer even greater value to our [North American] customers and the entire value chain. In addition to the clear benefits of expanding our product offering, we look forward to working together with a well-respected company to introduce high-quality flower products that stand out for their beauty and performance.”

Dümmen Group announced its Las Mercedes production facility in El Salvador has received MPS-ABC and MPS-GAP certifications for sustainability. The MPS-ABC certification pertains to fertilizer, chemical, energy and water usage and recycling, while the MPS-GAP relates to a wide variety of aspects concerning production.

The MPS audit, completed in June, also included assessment for the MPS-Socially Qualified certification,

which is expected to be awarded in the coming months. MPS is an organization launched in 1993 in the Netherlands that provides certifications to encourage reducing the environmental impact of ornamental growing.

“Sustainability has always been very important for our farm and we live up to that,” says Las Mercedes General Manager Carl Kroon, who accepted the certification at Cultivate’14 in the Dümmer Group booth. “It’s nice we are now certified with an independent organization that will do these things.”

“This certification would not have been there if not for this team and our people,” he added. In peak season, about 1,300 people work at the farm, with 500 there year-round. Kroon said it is the group’s goal to have all of Dümmer Group facilities MPS certified. As of right now, four other facilities have the MPS-ABC certification.

Here are just a few examples of the actions taken at Las Mercedes:

Water use: Las Mercedes uses a hydroponic system that minimizes the loss of water and fertilizer from the system. Water is recycled using slow sand filters and UV. Rainwater is collected from the roofs and infiltrated back into the soil; this returns more water to the natural system than used from the facility’s wells.

Chemicals: Las Mercedes adheres strictly to the MPS-permitted chemicals list, which excludes those with highly persistent half-lives. This means the farm doesn’t use some chemicals that are allowed by the EU; the stricter MPS guidelines are followed.

Energy: Las Mercedes receives ample sunlight and solar energy is being tested to supply significant power in the future. Geothermal energy was explored, but no useable heat exists in deep boreholes drilled on the site. **GT**