

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Tech On Demand Team Profile: Nick Flax

Bill Calkins



Specialist: A person who concentrates primarily on a particular subject or activity; a

person highly skilled in a specific and restricted field.

It's interesting that Nick Flax's title is "Technical Services Specialist." He's certainly highly skilled in the field of horticulture. But when it comes to his range of knowledge—it's quite wide. His peers and the Ball Seed customers he works with consider him a jack of all trades when it comes to solving greenhouse challenges and helping ensure crops go to market at the highest possible quality.



Pictured: Nick Flax's experience in greenhouses, as an extension expert and helping educate professionals across the industry, makes him a trusted resource for Ball Seed's customers.

"I'm like an emergency room doctor for greenhouse crops," Nick said. "The guy you call (or email or text) at Ball Seed when plants are dying, don't look right or when pests and diseases show up."

His experience in greenhouses, as an extension expert and helping educate professionals across the industry helps make Nick a trusted resource. That knowledge, coupled with his top-notch ability to listen and communicate, is why growers don't hesitate to reach out and pick his brain.

"Having a combination of academic and grower experience allows me to give growers practical strategies to avoid or deal with problems in the future," Nick explained. "I've touched all levels of the industry, from young plants and wholesale to retail and extension."

Giving growers peace of mind, so they know pests will go away and they won't keep losing plants, is critical in his role, he added.

As mentioned, Nick possesses exceptional communication skills—not only one on one with growers, but also as a weekly columnist for Ball Publishing's Tech On Demand e-newsletter. Each week, Nick shares timely production tips that can sometimes be very technical, but always include action-oriented, take-home messages. He likes to say that his advice translates the science of growing into practical application. His passion for sharing information with

growers to overcome challenges is clear.

“One of the things I love most about my job is helping solve problems,” he said. “It’s humbling to know I help protect people’s livelihoods each day.”

Talking to customers, hearing stories and discussing solutions is humanizing—especially in an industry full of big greenhouses full of plants that don’t talk back, he explained.



Pictured: Nick Flax has been featured in many Ball Tech On Demand video presentations, which have generated thousands of views and impressions. One of his passions is creating easy-to-use tools like training videos to help growers solve problems.

Engaging with dozens (sometimes hundreds) of growers each month, supporting Ball Seed’s suppliers and partners, and maintaining a weekly column keeps Nick pretty busy. However, he’s quick to share goals and ways he feels his skills can be leveraged, and is always looking for opportunities to improve

communication and try new tactics. You might recognize Nick from his multiple video presentations and documents shared through the Tech On Demand platform, which have generated thousands of views and impressions. Of course, he’s planning for even more in the short term.

“One of my goals is to create more easy-to-use tools to help growers solve problems,” he said. “We want to create packages of information accessible in multiple ways since people all learn differently.”

Something detailed in a white paper might not work for some, but a five-minute video will. If the content is interesting and engaging, the end result will be ongoing success for individual greenhouse businesses and for the industry as a whole, he explained.

In terms of specific interests, Nick feels that his past role in extension education and teaching pesticide application training helped develop his expertise in integrated pest management (IPM)—something he uses often in his role with Ball Seed. With so many changes in this field and the rapid adoption of biological control strategies and solutions, staying current is as important now as it’s ever been and this energizes him to keep learning.

“IPM is sort of my unofficial niche—both pests and diseases,” he said. “One goal I have is to gain even more specialized knowledge in biological IPM because so much is new and it’s constantly changing.”

Many of the growers he talks to are exploring biosolutions, reading new research and implementing approaches to replace or work in conjunction with conventional chemicals, Nick added.

Tech Tips from Nick Every Friday

Every Friday before lunch, more than 26,000 subscribers receive the Tech On Demand newsletter delivering cultural and technical information to greenhouse professionals, covering the latest research and timely production tips and tricks. The second article in the newsletter is titled “Nick’s Tip of the Week” where Nick Flax shares a concern that’s come up during one of his numerous calls with growers across North America and his advice on ways to solve or avoid it. From production planning to pest and disease control, these weekly tips are perfect for educating your team and refreshing them on best management practices.

Be sure to [subscribe to the Tech On Demand newsletter](#).

Go Onsite in the Greenhouse with Nick

In an ongoing series of videos, join Nick Flax as he shares tips and tricks to improve production from the beginning to the end. From proper seed storage, seeding line strategies and transplanting best practices, he'll share ways to optimize your greenhouse. Once crops are in production, measure pH and EC using different tried-and-true methods to keep plant nutrition on point.

Be sure to [subscribe to the Ball Seed YouTube channel](#) to access the "Onsite" playlist. It would be a good link to bookmark because Nick has many more videos planned.

Fun Fact

Nick is an avid SCUBA diver. He said the best spot he and his wife have gone to dive is Bonaire in the Southern Caribbean because you can dive there multiple times every day.

