

# GROWERTALKS

## GT in Brief

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## CAST Will Continue to Educate and Inspire

*Jennifer Zurko*

In April, plant breeders and suppliers who participate in the annual California Spring Trials announced the CAST dates for the next TWO years.

There was a lot of chatter this year about whether CAST would continue in its current format, due to the event's high cost and flat or even declining attendance. There were definitely more conversations centered around the topic, and during the event we were asked a few times if we'd heard anything beyond rumor and speculation. This is why representatives from Ball gave us the go-ahead to put the word out about the new dates.

"One of the reasons we decided to talk earlier is because CAST does need a lot of planning," said Claire Josephson, Director of Marketing Communications for Ball. "And we wanted to reach out to the customers—the main ones for CAST being the broker reps—and make sure that it's an event that's still of interest to them as part of our breeder launch process."

Since Spring Trials started as Pack Trials more than 40 years ago, the event has grown organically, and now it is not the only way to see new varieties before booking season. Jim Kennedy, Ball Seed's Director of Sales, said the biggest change is that CAST has become more about marketing and less about side-by-side trialing. The breeders have also made the new products more accessible through early sampling programs, allowing growers the opportunity to trial new varieties in their operations the year prior to their commercial launch.

There are also more digital tools now available. Some breeders provide new variety PowerPoint presentations that can get you the basics, while CAST is an in-person event that helps with more in-depth training, as well as gaining access to the product managers and breeding company teams.

"There's a lot that happens on the Spring Trials trip that helps to get that product into our supply chain. Our reps can start to think about where it's going to help benefit their customer within their territory," said Jim. "And it's about how we launch the product most effectively to reach the highest number of growers."

It does take a lot of time and resources—and everyone is always looking at their costs, which is probably why there was more conjecture about the fate of CAST this year. But for the breeders, the investment stretches far beyond just those few days at the end of March.

"We get a lot more out of this event than simply training broker reps, hosting growers and inviting the media," said Claire. "We also use it to gather a lot of content. It's a great opportunity to get candid messaging that's less of a sales pitch and more of where the product fits. We use it to gather photography, and video and social media

content. Then we use that content to remind the distribution companies of what they saw at CAST.”

“It sparks a lot of conversation,” she added. “We like to say it’s education and inspiration.”

“This is an event we know. It’s an event that the industry knows,” said Jim. “And the fact that we’re setting it up to do it again next year at the same time with the same approach suggests that the breeding companies have a significant stake hold in the event and find that it is a good use of dollars.”

Some rumored alternatives to CAST have included doing a similar event at a “neutral site,” where the participating breeding companies share space for their new products under the same roof. (Or tent, as it were.) But in order to grow the best quality plant material during that specific time of year, growing the plants and holding the event in California makes the most sense.

Plus, Claire said that hosting it at your own site—whether at a greenhouse facility or taking over a winery for a week—allows for more “independent discussion.”

So CAST will remain a regular occurrence for the foreseeable future, which means you get to look forward to the “Bobbleheads Show” via our newsletters and videos. (Someone recently told me that we’re “edu-tainers” because our CAST videos had a lot of good info and were fun. I like that!)

**The future dates of CAST again are:**

**2025—Wednesday through Saturday, March 26-29**

**2026—Wednesday through Saturday, March 25-28**