

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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No Grower is an Island

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Every new grower has felt their stomach drop when faced with a crop issue, personnel problem or customer question that they haven't encountered before. When I experienced these moments early in my career, I often did everything in my power to avoid saying, "I don't know." For some reason, as a fresh college graduate, admitting that I didn't possess all of the horticultural knowledge in the world sounded terrifying. I felt like everyone around me would be furious (or at least extremely disappointed) if I told them I didn't know something. News flash: They were already well aware that I didn't know everything there is to know about growing plants. Nobody does!

As growers, our job is to spot problems and then find and implement solutions. Although over time we should become familiar with our crops and be proactive in treating common issues, we'll never run out of things to learn—especially since the horticulture industry constantly changes, with new varieties, new technologies and new techniques emerging every year. Fortunately, we don't have to walk through this constant learning process alone. There are multitudes of resources available to help us succeed in every stage of our careers and tons of people who are eager to share their hard-won knowledge to prevent others from making the same mistakes they did once upon a time.

Industry associations are a gold mine of information and connections for people starting out in the horticulture industry. The International Plant Production Society (IPPS) offers scholarships to students pursuing relevant degrees and travel grants to young professionals wanting to attend their first IPPS conference. These conferences happen around the United States and abroad, and offer attendees the chance to take classes, tour nurseries and network.

Seed Your Future is an organization that works to spread the word about horticulture careers using educational materials and social media campaigns to help students from middle school to college find the information they need to be successful on their future green career paths. Seed Your Future's website has links to scholarships, internships and horticulture camps for students, a job board for recent graduates looking for work, and internship resources for employers who want to incorporate fresh talent into their operation, but aren't sure how.

AmericanHort may be one of the most well-known industry associations, mainly because they sponsor and organize Cultivate, the enormous trade show that welcomes thousands of plant people to Ohio every July. AmericanHort

offers discounted memberships for students and young professionals, but even without officially joining, you can access lists of learning opportunities (in both English and Spanish), see upcoming events and trade shows, and stay informed on how current government legislation is affecting the horticulture industry (and what the AmericanHort advocacy team is doing about it).

These are just a few broad examples of industry associations, but I promise that no matter what and where you grow, there's an association for you!

Attending in-person events like conferences and trade shows is a quick way to make a lot of connections with a lot of smart people. This year was my first time at Cultivate and I was starstruck by how many of my horticulture heroes I was able to meet in person. While it's great to connect with other professionals on LinkedIn or through email, it's entirely different to shake somebody's hand and be able to have a face-to-face conversation. I left the show feeling energized, encouraged and equipped to handle future problems after spending the weekend meeting and learning from dozens of experts on every subject—from pesticides and fertilizers to management and communications.

While it may feel intimidating to join an association or walk into a trade show as a horticulture rookie, don't forget that you bring something to the table, too. Your fresh perspective might allow you to come up with creative solutions to plant problems just by looking at issues in a different way. Take advantage of the collaborative, generous nature of the folks in our industry and collect all of the knowledge you can while offering your best in return. Remember, "no man is an island"—and no grower needs to be an island either! **GT**

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