

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Collaborative Knowledge

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Large companies often have dedicated research and development teams that can test new technologies, trial production practices, evaluate products, analyze data and spend time answering questions before making a major change.

For many growers, there may not be an R&D team or person whose job is to run trials. There may not be extra greenhouse space to experiment with a new production method. And when every bench, labor hour and input has to earn its keep, “Let’s test it and see” can be an expensive proposition. But that doesn’t mean smaller operations should have less access to research. In many ways, that’s exactly where an organization like the American Floral Endowment (AFE) can provide value.

Research without building a Research Department

AFE supports research across the floriculture industry on issues that affect production, profitability, crop quality and long-term competitiveness. That includes work on pest and disease management, water use, production technology, automation, substrates, nutrition, breeding, post-harvest quality, sustainability and other challenges growers deal with every day.

While a single grower may not be able to fund all of that work, collectively, the industry can through AFE. Instead of every business independently trying to answer the same questions, we can help identify common challenges, fund researchers with the expertise and facilities to study them, and make the results freely available to the industry. For a grower without an in-house R&D team, that can mean access to information that could otherwise be difficult or expensive to develop independently.

Think of it as shared R&D. We create a body of easily accessible, independent, industry-focused information that growers can use when evaluating new ideas and making production decisions. That doesn’t eliminate the need for individual judgment or on-site trials where feasible; every operation is different. But it can help growers start from a much stronger place.



AFE-funded researchers scouting for thrips at a commercial greenhouse.



Your challenges help shape the research

The shared R&D idea only works if growers help define what needs to be studied. Researchers are experts in designing experiments and answering specific questions in a scientifically rigorous way. Growers are experts in knowing where production gets difficult, expensive or inefficient, and what ideas are actually practical for real-world production systems.

That's why we spend so much time gathering industry input and involving growers in our research review process. (If you've read any of my previous articles, you've seen that.) We want to hear about new problems, as well as the problems that evolve or keep coming back. Those concerns help shape research priorities and help us evaluate which proposals are most relevant to the industry. In that sense, supporting AFE research is helping build the R&D capacity of the entire floriculture industry.

The value goes beyond one operation

The industry benefits when everyone succeeds. One of the advantages of industry-supported research is that a good answer can benefit far more than one business. A new disease-management strategy might help

hundreds of operations. A better irrigation approach may apply across multiple crops and production systems. Research on automation or production technology can help growers decide where an investment makes sense and where it doesn't. Even a project that begins with a very specific production challenge can generate information that helps growers avoid costly trial and error.

That shared benefit is important. Through AFE, the industry can pool resources and fund work that no single operation would be expected to take on alone.

What this means for your operation

For growers, one of the potential benefits is greater access to university researchers, emerging technologies and production strategies, and results that can help inform decisions before making a change. Just as importantly, your feedback helps us shape the questions being asked and identifies the challenges that deserve research attention. You directly shape the direction of our research and resources.

For AFE, the responsibility is to make sure that research remains relevant, practical and accessible. Funding the project is only part of the job. We also need to communicate the results clearly, connect growers with the information they need and continue asking whether the work is actually addressing important industry challenges.

That's where AFE can increasingly serve as a research resource for the businesses that make up this industry. Part of how we do this is to make the results of that research easy to find and use. Growers can explore current and completed research projects on our website (endowment.org), search research reports by topic and access practical educational resources through programs like the Grow Pro Webinar Series, Sustainabloom and the Thrips & Botrytis Research Library.

We also regularly translate research findings into articles, webinars, newsletters and other grower-friendly tools so you don't have to dig through technical reports to find the takeaway. Our goal is to give you a place to start and connect you with research that can help inform your next decision. We've also added Spanish translation services to our website and the Growing Further newsletter, ensuring our results reach more industry professionals than ever

before.



AFE research results on stage at Cultivate'26.

An R&D team you don't have to hire

I don't expect you to look at AFE and literally think, "That's my research department." But maybe we could get a little closer to that idea. If your operation is facing a problem that research could help solve, or if you see a production challenge emerging across the industry, tell us. If AFE-funded research has helped you make a decision, avoid a mistake or try something new, tell us that, too.

And if you value having independent floriculture research available when you need it, consider supporting the organization that makes it possible. AFE's research exists because the industry invests in it. That investment helps give growers, regardless of the size of their operation, access to research, expertise and answers they might not be able to develop on their own.

You may not have an R&D team on your payroll, but you shouldn't have to solve every problem by yourself. **GT**

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