

From Polishing Job Descriptions to Critical Hiring Forms



Crop culture and commentary for fresh-cut flower growers

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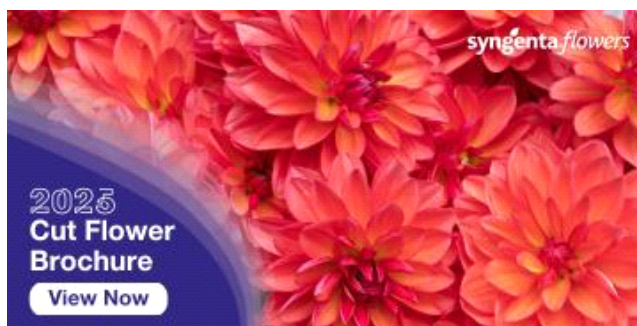
BLOOM BEAT

Crop culture and commentary for fresh-cut flower growers

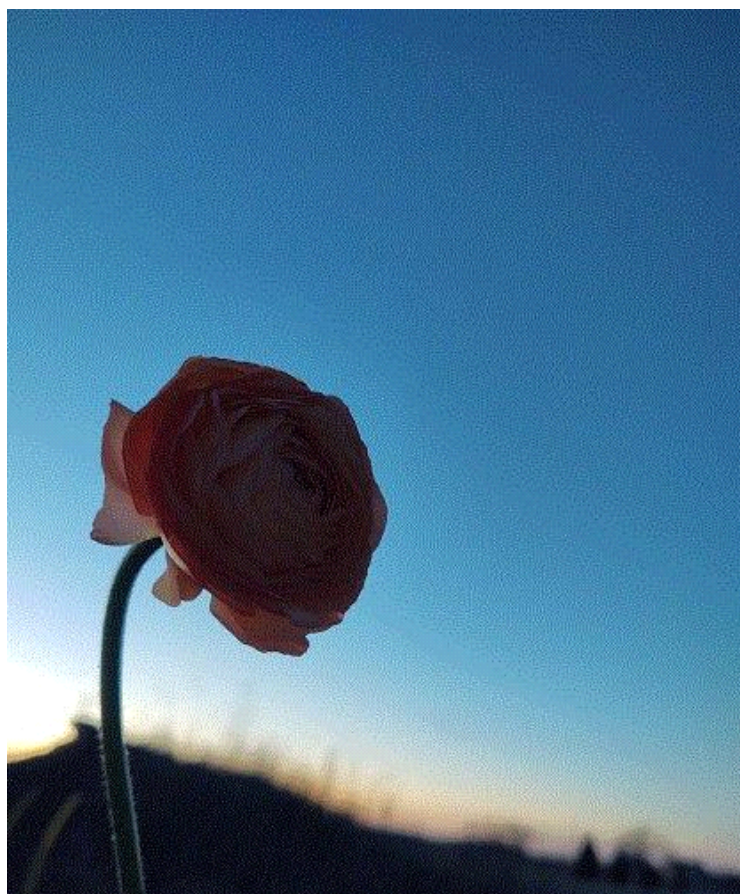


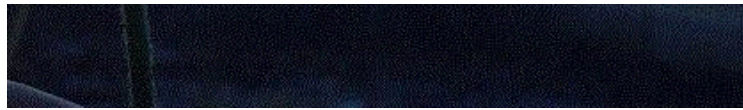
COMING UP THIS WEEK:

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More About Hiring & In Closing



Mid-January Farm Update





A single stem of La Belle Champagne at dusk at the farm. One of our favorite ranunculus.

Holy smokes, Tater and I can't believe we're over halfway through January already! We're still knee deep in seed catalogs and are mapping out our outdoor production for the summer months, as well as coming up with our integrated pest management plan for our indoor dahlias.

January is a great time to prepare, because once the middle of February hits, it's all about the spring flowers. Harvesting, selling and documenting the beautiful process of anemone, ranunculus, stock, snaps, sweet pea and the other early flowers.

We sold our first 10-stem bunch of ranunculus last week. Needless to say, we're incredibly excited, although we have a long way to go before we start harvesting ranunculus by the arm load.

In addition to spring and summer crop production, we're also dusting off our job descriptions. January and early February are when we start creating our hiring game plan for the upcoming season. Buckle your seat belts—we have some administrative ground to cover! With all that being said, let's talk shop.



Time to Revamp Your Job Descriptions

Are you thinking about hiring employees for the 2023 season? If you are, now is the time to start writing or revamping your job descriptions, because believe it or not, spring will be here before you know it and you want to be ready!

The best way to find a great fit for your farm is to have a comprehensive job description. One of the challenges we had hiring in the past is folks who are in love with gardening wanting to apply to work on our farm—which is a great first step!

But not all applicants understand that commercial production of flowers is labor intensive and dramatically different than growing for pleasure in the garden. Our breathtaking images and videos on social media paints a romantic and somewhat whimsical picture, which isn't always a bad thing to get people in the door (customers or employees). But we also need to widen the lens for interested applicants so that they understand the breadth of the work involved, AKA eliminate the Instagram filter.

That is why job descriptions are powerful tools. Applicants know ahead of time what the job will entail. I encourage you to use language such as, "Must be able to lift X lbs." and/or "Must be able to stand, crouch and bend over for extended periods of time." (More about this in a minute.)

As you craft your job description, I encourage you to be as specific as possible. For those of you writing your first job description, check out this [ARTICLE](#) from the University of Wisconsin. This article describes each part of the job description and is a great introduction to the process. Don't just copy and paste another farm's job description; take the time to customize it and make it fit your farm.

Once you hire someone, job descriptions can also be used to assess employee progress, if the job description is written well. For those of you reworking your current job description, here are some tips from [Harvard Business School](#):

- Make your job title count. It should be descriptive, accurate and eye catching. Use searchable key words.
- Make your job description easy to read. Bulky paragraphs can be hard to process. Use bullet points when possible—that way, candidates can quickly determine whether your position is a fit. It'll save you a lot of time during the interview process if unsuitable candidates weed themselves out before they apply.
- Write how you talk.
- If you want to add a short description of your farm, put it at the end of the job description.
- Evaluate what qualifications are essential. This is where you can qualify what physical or educational requirements are needed. Or what prior experience may be equivalent.



Applications Open for HortScholars!



Can you guess which one is me? I met some of my closest green industry friends at this show!

Going to Cultivate as a HortScholar was one of the highlights of my college career. I wouldn't trade it for anything. Are you a horticulture student enrolled in a secondary education program? (This includes two year, undergraduate and graduate students.) Then you're eligible to apply!

Each year, AmericanHort sends six horticulture students to Cultivate, all expenses paid! For those of you who are unfamiliar with Cultivate, it's an all-encompassing event ... from greenhouse, nursery, retailers, distributors—pretty much anything that has to do with the green industry is there! It's an incredible experience and anyone in the green industry needs to go at least once. Cultivate attracts thousands of professionals from all over the country and the world.

Now back to the HortScholars Program ... HortScholars help set up plant displays before the show starts. You'll see how the show and displays come to life, as well as connect with other student volunteers from various schools. HortScholars also get to enjoy the trade show and educational sessions as a normal attendee would, but they get the VIP treatment.

AmericanHort schedules lunches, dinner and coffee with the industry's major players. One of the highlights of my experience way back in 2016 was having coffee with Anna Ball, owner and CEO of Ball Horticultural. I also really clicked with the other five HortScholars and I consider a handful of them close friends to this day. It truly is a once-in-a-lifetime networking opportunity and professional development experience.

If you're on the fence, don't delay! Interested students will need two letters of recommendation and must complete the [online application](#) by February 1. Cultivate'23 is July 15-July 18 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center in Columbus, Ohio.



I-9 Form Basics

There are a handful of forms you need to fill out with your new hire when they start working with you. The I-9 form is one of the critical pieces you need to fill out with your employees once they're hired. The I-9, or the employment eligibility verification form, basically is how you verify an employee is who they say they are. John Doe is actually John Doe.

This is not a new concept; employers have had to do this since the 1980s. You must do this for every employee you hire. Bear in mind, if you're treating your hires as subcontractors (there are pros and cons to this), then you don't have to fill out the I-9 form. But the hires you're treating as employees, whether they're a citizen or not, must fill out this form.

Employees must present a form(s) of acceptable identification from the respective columns that are listed on the last page of the I-9 form. This includes, but is not limited to: driver's license, passport, school ID card, Social Security card and so on. Some employers keep photocopies of the identification, others do not. We photocopy each form of identification they give us. (There are mixed thoughts on this.)

Also, this form is time-sensitive—it must be completed within the first three days of employment. And section one must be completed on the first day of employment. The form must be completed after the employee is selected for the position and accepts the offer, not during the interview process.

For those of you wanting to take a deep dive into I-9 compliance, [there's a 30 minute video](#) from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. If an employee needs assistance completing section one of the form, then assistance can be provided. Whoever provides the assistance in helping complete the form, they must then fill out the Translator/Preparer block on the I-9 form.

You must keep I-9 forms for all current employees. For past employees, you must keep I-9 forms for three years after the hire date or one year after employment ends (whichever is later).

For more information on the I-9, be sure to check out [I-9 central](#) at the U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services website.

In Closing and Other Hiring Considerations

Bear in mind the I-9 is just one of the handful of forms you need to complete for new hires. You'll need them to fill out state and federal W-4 forms for withholdings. You can decide to run payroll

yourself or hire a company.

We subcontract this out—I decided early on I was better off doing other farm-related things and leaving the payroll withholdings to the professionals. Although, if you have an HR background and are a payroll wizard, more power to you to do it on your own. I've been told that if you miss your quarterly filings the fines can be very steep. That was enough for me to leave it to the professionals! The costs are pretty minimal when you factor that risk.

Hiring employees is a major jump for a farm. A lot of farms when they first start hiring employees treat them as a subcontractor, and as a result, the employee is responsible for their own withholdings. At the end of the year, the farm issues a 1099 so that they can still claim the worker as an expense. It's easier for you as the employer, but places the onus on the employees. If you're planning for your farm to have employees long term, I encourage you to treat your hires as employees and not subcontractors. Establish the rhythm early.

If you're looking for a comprehensive how-to-hire employees guide, call or connect with your local Small Business Association district office. Here's the [link](#) to find your district office! The SBA has lots of resources to help you grow your farm and be compliant with state and federal laws.

If you're hiring employees, you'll need workman's compensation insurance. The best part is many state industry organizations have group workman's compensation funds that are very competitive and reasonably priced. For instance, Michigan has the Michigan Horticulture Industries self insured workers' compensation fund. MHI for short.

Be sure to check in with your state floral association, farm bureau or green industry association to see if they have a similar program in your state. You can also check in with your current service provider.

If you're thinking about hiring employees for the first time, you want to keep in mind that you'll be paying more than just the hourly wage/salary you pay the employee. Employers pay approximately 30% in taxes on top of the wage you pay the employee. (This [ARTICLE](#) from Gusto is really great at explaining this.) The exact cost of an employee will depend on what the payroll taxes are for your state.

Hiring employees is an investment and is one of the highest direct costs in producing your flowers. It's not a decision to be taken lightly; you certainly want to plan for the expense and also have enough work to make it worth your while and theirs.

Tater and I are cheering for you and your farms this season! Take the time in the next couple weeks to polish up your job description and your hiring process. When we took the first step to hire employees it truly was a game changer for the farm and a critical step in our development. Stay well and we'll talk to you soon! And, as always, if there's a flower farming topic you have your heart set on learning about, drop Tater and me a line at ldaschner@ballpublishing.com.

In the meantime, Tater and I are cooking a belated Christmas dinner. Actually almost a month to the day late. Last month, we had a wicked cold and a windy winter storm. It was all hands on deck to make sure heaters were running and water lines and dahlia tubers weren't freezing. Tater and I spent Christmas Eve night at the farm. Better late than never right? Talk to you soon!

P.S. If you haven't checked your dahlia tubers recently, Tater thinks you should do that this week.

Lindsay 

Lindsay Daschner (and Tater)

Editor-at-Large—*Bloom Beat*

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