

# GROWERTALKS

## Features

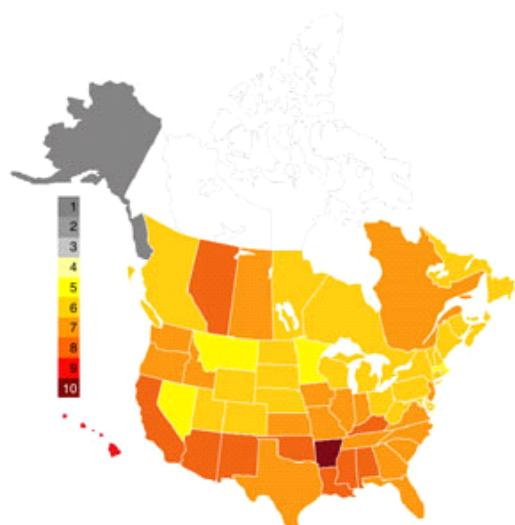
7/30/2014

### Spring 2014: Better Than its 6.7 Rating

*Chris Beytes*

Sometimes numbers don't tell the whole story. Take this spring, for instance, which rated just 6.7 for the U.S. and a 6.5 for Canada, on a scale of 1 to 10 in *Acres Online's* Third Annual Spring Weekend Survey. Those are the average of all weekend scores from March 1-2 to June 21-22.

Those ratings sound low in a season that most growers and retailers tell me was very good to great. Which is why I'm not surprised that, when I asked you to send me your gut-feel rating for the entire season (which 49 of you did), those scores averaged 8.2 for the U.S. and 7.2 for Canada—considerably higher than the weekly average, and probably more representative of how the season was.



Why the disparity? Three reasons:

1. My rating system treats each week equally, with a March weekend having as much clout as Mother's Day. So a poor March will drag down, mathematically, a great May. Here are the monthly averages, so you can see what I mean.

If I do the math and leave March out, the season averages jump to 7.5 and 7.0.

2. May and June sales are much more important to you than those of March (depending upon where you're located, of course), so a strong May and June has a positive impact on your rating, whether you operate from your gut or based on sales increases.

3. A strong finish to the season gives you a psychological lift. Just like with golf, you feel better about your round if you finish with a birdie, even if you triple bogey the first hole. But finish poorly and you have a less positive perception of the round—or the season.

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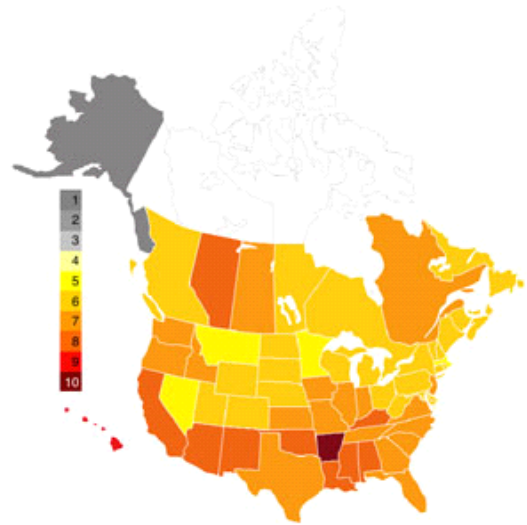
## The regional and state breakdowns

### Regions

New England 7.1  
East 7.2  
South 6.2  
Midwest 6.5  
Plains 7.2  
Mountain 7.1  
West 7.4  
Northwest 7.2

### States

Alabama 8.0  
Alaska 3.4  
Arizona 7.5  
Arkansas 10  
California 8.1  
Colorado 5.8  
Connecticut 6.1  
Delaware 7.3  
Florida 6.5  
Georgia 7.4  
Hawaii 9.0  
Idaho 6.5  
Illinois 6.7  
Indiana 7.4  
Iowa 6.6  
Kansas 6.6  
Kentucky 8.0  
Louisiana 8.0  
Maine 6.3  
Maryland 6.5  
Massachusetts 5.7  
Michigan 5.9  
Minnesota 5.6  
Mississippi 8.0  
Missouri 6.8  
Montana 5.3  
Nebraska 6.4  
Nevada 5.5  
New Hampshire 6.3  
New Jersey 6.8  
New Mexico 7.3



New York 6.3  
North Carolina 6.7  
North Dakota 5.5  
Ohio 6.1  
Oklahoma 7.0  
Oregon 7.0  
Pennsylvania 6.3  
Rhode Island 6.4  
South Carolina 6.8  
South Dakota 6.0  
Tennessee 7.1  
Texas 6.9  
Utah 6.0  
Vermont 6.7  
Virginia 7.0  
Washington 7.0  
West Virginia 6.6  
Wisconsin 5.8  
Wyoming 5.9

Now, a few of those scores need to be accompanied by a grain of salt. Arkansas, for instance, is based on just one score, a 10 the week of May 3-4. Alaska's is based on five ratings, sent in between April and early May (1, 3, 4, 3 and 6). It had to be better than that up there.

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## Meanwhile, up in Canada

Canada, meanwhile, never had the chance to build past an average year, although your 7.2 finish isn't bad. The season never starts early up there, except maybe in mild BC. April and May were more than a point behind the U.S., as shown in the month chart above.

Provincially speaking, Alberta managed a 7.9 overall, but the rest of the country averaged only in the 6 range. Manitoba was 5.2. British Columbia and Ontario had strong weekends, as did Quebec, but not enough to make the season as exceptional as we had down here. Still, most of the bad news came early, when good weather is nice but doesn't promote booming sales. So it could have been worse.

Here are the Canadian province ratings for the season.

Canada  
Atlantic 6.1  
Newfoundland and Labrador 6.3  
Quebec 6.6  
Ontario 6.6  
Manitoba 5.2  
Saskatchewan 6.9  
Alberta 7.9  
British Columbia 6.3

Nunavut —  
Northwest Territories —  
Yukon —

No replies at all from the three northernmost territories. I guess the bridge to Yellowknife is still out.

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## Yet you rate the season 8.2 and 7.2

As mentioned above, your gut rating of the entire season in the U.S. was 8.2—1.5 points higher than the actual score. For Canada, the rating is 7.2—0.7 points higher, showing that the season finished decently, but not very much stronger than the weekly average indicates.

If I was smart, I could figure a way to turn that 1.5-point difference into a weighting formula to take into account the relatively low importance of March and the high importance of May. But that assumes this is a scientific survey to begin with and it's not.

Still, Spring 2014 will go down as a great season, according to many of you. Here are some comments from a pair of 10s and a 9 (two of them used the term “best”):

“Overall for the year, it was a 10. Great May made up for slow April. Sold out of many things quickly (which explains why we had record sales that month) and to date is our best year yet.”

—Trevor Woldhuis, *Woldhuis Farms Sunrise Greenhouse, Grant Park, Illinois*

“Spring overall was a 10. Eleven perfect weekends in a row and extended spring temps helped us sell out harder than I can recall in the last 10 years. March was dismal—worse than last March, which was our previous worst ever. And not from lack of product, which makes me think weather still matters.”

—Paul Westervelt, *Saunders Brothers, Piney River, Virginia*

“I don't have the final numbers for June yet, but the first five months for us showed three of those to be record-breaking. We are up 5% over last year, to make this our best ever. The ends of May and June have shown significant slowdown, so we will see if we can hold on to those gains. Season is at a 9 because I always want to leave room for a better year!”

—Scott Klittich, *Otto & Sons Nursery, Fillmore, California*

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*Methodology: Starting with the first weekend in March and continuing through the third weekend in June, I ask readers of my weekly e-newsletter Acres Online to rate the previous weekend on a scale of 1 to 10. They can use math—for instance, comparing this year to previous years and assigning a value to an increase or decrease. Or they can just use their gut. I tabulate the numbers by state and region, averaging them for a final score. The hortisticians call it “aggregating opinion,” which sounds official to me. **GT***