GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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The Hawaii/Canada Connection

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Orchid breeder Jim McCully shares his passion for all things oncidiinae with a group of growers, interiorscapers and floral designers during the 2015 Hawaii MIDPAC Horticultural Conference & Expo tour. Jim, a breeder and expert on oncidium orchids and others within the subtribe, educated and entertained the crowd with his knowledge of breeding and the global orchid business.

Interestingly, eight of the businesses in attendance were from Canada, courtesy of a trade mission funded in part by a USDA Market Access Program (MAP) grant, which helps ag producers defray the costs of overseas marketing and promotion.

Hawaii Export Nursery Association President Dawn Kitagawa (an attorney who runs her family's three nursery locations in Hawaii) explained that the Hawaii Floriculture and Nursery Association (HFNA) joined with the state's papaya and coffee grower associations to form the Synergistic Hawaii Agriculture Council to pursue grant moneys for marketing their agricultural products internationally. HFNA members decided to make a trip to Canada to seek out potential customers. They returned the next year to host trade fairs in Toronto and Vancouver with the help of local customers who were already fans of Hawaiian product.

"In return," says Dawn, "last year and this year, we brought our Canadian customers here on a reverse trade mission." The wholesaler growers, interiorscapers and floral designers participated in a daylong, five-stop grower tour of the Big Island followed by conference and trade show near Kona (at which your scribe spoke).

"We think it's wonderful because that's what we were given a grant to do, to pursue business," said Dawn. "And [Canada] wants our flowers and plants. We've made some very strong connections." **GT**