

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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Clarity of Purpose

Gary Mangum



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It's been another year in and around the greenhouses living with outside forces that consume so much energy—pesticides, regulation, social media, even awards. I often wonder if we'll ever get back to the days where our focus can be plant-centric. As I reflect on this year where so many different things occurred, I still come back to the forces outside of our business that impact how I spent my own time and even how we allocate resources across the company.

Early this spring, while Maryland's legislature was in session, we spent an inordinate amount of time and attention sharing and discussing peer-reviewed science related to pesticide use and pollinators (so much that we hired a lobbyist specializing in Maryland agriculture!). Fortunately, we had better media tools in the box than last session, including *The*

Huffington Post's dismantling of the Harvard study and other excellent articles by Jon Entine, a semblance of reason from the American Bee Journal confirming "Beepocalypse Not," and indisputable increasing hive and production numbers from the USDA. This data continues to make the case that neonics are currently the safest pesticides on the market for use in ornamental horticulture and planting flowers is one of the best ways to boost healthy pollinator populations.

Meanwhile, we've installed 10 beehives at our main Burtonsville growing facility to learn how bees would thrive in conditions alongside our greenhouses and foraging on Bell-grown flowers. We've learned that beekeeping is a rigorous undertaking and not something that should be taken on without full commitment to the process.

Regulations have produced fiscal demands on our business throughout the current administration, beginning with the implementation of ObamaCare. As the September 15 AmericanHort email reminds us, we will continue to be bombarded by challenges that will cause more industry consolidation as some businesses simply can't keep up with compliance or fail to gain compensation from their customer base for the inherent added costs.

Just a few AmericanHort challenges being considered federally:

- 1 | The Labor Department refuses to extend the comment period for overtime changes
- 2 | Comments on EPA bee mitigation proposal
- 3 | A weighty issue for those shipping by truck
- 4 | The “waters” rule update

Then there are the positive distractions, like being reminded of the power of social media. Last week, many of Bell’s almost 40,000 Facebook followers went wild for “My Favorite Mum,” a post showcasing a 13-in. tricolor mum we introduced last year with limited production. Based on strong sales and positive online feedback, we more than doubled production in 2015, and based on the response to this post, we’re already looking at significant increases in this product next year. Through social media, we’re reaching, inspiring and drawing feedback from more and more customers every day, driving them to where our plants are sold, benefitting our retail partner—The Home Depot—in our own regions and beyond.

Finally, I was reminded again recently just how important it is to focus on the quality of the plant through the very competitive selection process for an industry grower award. We celebrate Tom Wheeler’s passion for growing a superior product and his longtime role with Bell. The award is an honor for Tom specifically and the company overall.

With all of these and other distractions, clarity of purpose becomes ever more important in what we attempt to do each day. For me, execution starts with a clear vision of what I want to accomplish. Over the years, I’ve found that sketching out the goals for a month or a week usually starts at home on a Sunday afternoon. Whether I’m alone at my desk, in the water or the woods, I need my “think time.” Time to clear out the clutter and focus on what matters. Lucky for me, in this business, what ultimately matters are the plants! **GT**

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