

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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SAF, AFE Partner Up to Advance Floral Industry Research Priorities

Jennifer Zurko

A groundbreaking research fund that has supported scientific innovation in the floral industry for nearly three decades is getting a boost in its effort to provide high-quality, cutting-edge research today and into the future, thanks to a strategic new agreement between two longtime industry groups.

Effective August 1, the Society of American Florists (SAF) will continue to support the Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative (FNRI) through key administrative functions, including lobbying for additional funding and communicating with members of Congress so they're aware of the importance of FNRI research to the floral industry and their constituents.

Meanwhile, the American Floral Endowment (AFE) will assume the role of floral industry liaison with the U.S. Department of Agriculture for FNRI, identifying research priorities, making recommendations to the USDA's Agricultural Research Service and evaluating the progress of research to ensure it's meeting its objectives.

"AFE and SAF have a long history of working closely together on myriad projects, and over the past two years, AFE's Research Committee has provided expert feedback on FNRI research, making this new partnership a logical next step," said Terri Nell, Ph.D., AAF, AFE's research coordinator and a past SAF president. "As a nonprofit organization that funds research and scholarships in floriculture and environmental horticulture that benefit all segments of the floral industry, AFE is perfectly positioned to help identify the industry challenges and priorities best suited for FNRI research."

Established by SAF and the then American Nursery and Landscape Association in the late 1990s, FNRI plays a critical role in generating scientific research on high-priority issues that affect all segments, including post-harvest technology, water quality, and pest and disease management. Funds have also been used to create solutions to challenges posed by *Ralstonia solanacearum*, a bacterium that attacks geranium plants, along with pests such as whitefly and pythium. FNRI research has also led to new technology in future pest management practices, including biological controls that could reduce the use of pesticides.

Keeping the Initiative top-of-mind among lawmakers is an important task and it's one that SAF will continue to prioritize, with support from its third-party partner Cornerstone Government Affairs, said Drew Gruenberg, SAF's COO, who noted that in the past two years Congress has voted to increase the Initiative's funding level by \$1 million.

"Thanks to the dedication of SAF members, we've been able to generate an impressive level of support for FNRI on Capitol Hill," he explained. "This is a testament to how deeply FNRI resonated with lawmakers and how valuable our

lobbying efforts are, both year-round and during our annual Congressional Action Days events. We look forward to continuing in that role and to working alongside our friends and colleagues at AFE.”

Drew also made it clear that the new structure will not affect SAF’s longstanding partnership with AmericanHort in lobbying for new FNRI funding or in collaborating with the Horticultural Research Institute (HRI) on industry research priorities.

“SAF will continue to work collaboratively with AmericanHort to gain visibility for FNRI in Congress,” he said. “And the important interaction and sharing between AFE, HRI and USDA-ARS will remain.” **GT**