

GROWERTALKS

Guest Column

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Bolster Your Marketing & Boost Profitability With AAS & NGB

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All-America Selections (AAS) and National Garden Bureau (NGB) are non-profit organizations with a mission to nationally trial and award outstanding edible and ornamental genetics, market the winners, and promote the hobby of gardening to the home gardener. Think of them as a trialing, marketing and PR firm working on behalf of the horticulture industry—our industry's only non-profit brand ambassadors and influencers!

These sister organizations have been led by the hard-working Executive Director Diane Blazek for over 14 years. The organizations are thriving due to her drive and the dedication of industry professional volunteers. As the current president of AAS and member of the board for over five years, I've seen the tremendous efforts put into the programs AAS/NGB offers and wanted to share the ways these two organizations benefit our industry and how everyone can capitalize on them.

The AAS program is an effective way to promote the latest and greatest genetics from breeders that have exceptional garden performance. Trialing is very near and dear to my heart, so it's comforting to know that this 90-year-old program instills a confidence that comes from knowing the AAS Winners have been trialed to industry standards and recommended for awards by industry professionals. Most of the marketing AAS/NGB does is consumer-facing. This marketing is arguably the most important element to ensure demand from the people ultimately taking our products home, but this is often not the segment most invested in, especially by breeders, as it takes significant resources. AAS/NGB steps up to meet this need.

Breeders

While it's not free for breeders to submit varieties to the AAS trials, there are many benefits of having a winner, including the data that comes back if it doesn't win. Breeders get valuable feedback (scores, comments and photos) from the judges at all the trialing locations across the U.S. and Canada.

To optimize your AAS submissions, choose varieties that are popular in the North American market, were produced from innovative breeding and have exceptional garden performance. Since AAS focuses heavily on consumer marketing, submitting varieties that have branded programs that consumers will see at retail will drive demand and sell-through. Varieties that are "one-offs" and not part of a series, as well as individual varieties within a high-performing series, both make great candidates.

As breeders, you have a lot invested in the success of a new product introduction, so ensure it takes off quickly for a faster return on that investment by putting it in AAS. It may even become a Gold Medal Winner! Once you have a

winner, use the AAS logo in catalogs, on websites and tag your winners at industry events.

There are NGB programs breeder-members can participate in, like submitting varieties to NGB's New Plants Program that growers and retailers utilize to choose their assortments for the season. Garden communicators and consumers use the program to find the newest of the new. Combos can be submitted to NGB's Combination Ideas Program. You work hard trialing new combinations, so make the effort worth it by providing images and details of those combinations for producers, retailers and consumers to use.

Brokers

We all know how important seeing new varieties in trials is for gaining confidence in plant performance. Schedule some of AAS's Introduction Gardens into your summer travel plans to see the most recent winners in all their glory.

AAS creates presentations of winners each year to equip broker sales reps with pertinent information to recommend new varieties to producers. Use the AAS logo in catalogs, ordering platforms and product pages to indicate its award-winning performance. Then create a search function for AAS Winners to aid your customers in finding these stellar varieties.

Producers (young plants and finished product)

AAS has a Wholesale Sources page for growers looking for seed or young plants of AAS Winners. If you're a young plant producer growing AAS Winners, you should be included on that page! If you're a finishing grower, you should use that page as a resource.

Producers can use NGB's free Combination Ideas Program mentioned above for combination ideas or to just get some inspiration.

And make sure you use the plant tags provided by all the tag and label manufacturers that include the AAS logos. The AAS logo will be recognizable to consumers from social media and other marketing efforts, so make sure it's easy to find at retail.

Retailers

AAS has bench cards for every winner that you can download, print and put in your displays. Retailers can partner with a local AAS Display Garden to direct garden visitors to where they can buy the AAS Winners seen in those gardens. They can also use NGB's New Plants Program to find new varieties to offer to customers. All photography is in one place so it can be easily downloaded for use and promotion.

NGB's "Year of the" Program is a great way to jump on a national marketing campaign for popular crop classes that you can adapt to your own product assortment. This is a program that can be used throughout the chain of distribution from breeders to retailers. The crops featured each year are robust in variety, have innovative new breeding and rising consumer interest. Everyone has access to logos, images and any of the informational content included in this program. If you struggle to write engaging content for emails or social media, use the vast variety of pre-written content available. **GT**

You can access all the information discussed here and more at all-americanselections.org and ngb.org. Please join us at [Cultivate'23](#), Saturday, July 15 from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. for our session, "Improving Profitability with Free Marketing Programs," to hear more ideas from a panel of industry experts and be part of the discussion.

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