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International Plant Propagators' Society, combined proceedings, 2010, 60:303-306. 2011.

Ten Basic Principles for Improved Nursery Performance

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INTRODUCTION

I have been involved with commercial horticulture all my life and I am well aware that there have always been cycles of varying prosperity for commercial growers. I am around the same age as IPPS and it is noticeable that in the early years of our society the focus of meetings was mainly on improved techniques for propagating and growing plants. Improved methods generated better plants more efficiently and improved the profitability of growers.

However it is noticeable that despite the increase in knowledge there are some nurseries that prospered and some that did not. Conference organisers obviously made the same observation and adapted their subject matter accordingly. The subjects covered in later years show the recognition of the increasing importance of mechanisation, marketing, and business skills.

My period of service on the International Board has enabled me to see, and compare a wide range of management techniques in most of our member regions. That period has coincided with a period of changing global economy and difficult trading conditions for most growers. It has been interesting comparing the strategies that have been adopted to maintain viability and build for the future. My impression is that there are no quick fixes, rather a series of basic principles that are common to successful growers worldwide.

FORWARD PLANNING

Most places make an effort to tidy up for visitors, but there are some nurseries that stand out from the crowd, because their whole enterprise and culture is logical. It is obvious that a great deal of thought has gone into what they do and how they do it.

Anything and everything that can be planned has been planned. With greater demands for uniformity of product it is important to have a nursery layout that provides uniform growing conditions when needed. Production plans have been integrated with sales demands and the pressures of short notice despatch requirements. Batch potting has been used to reduce travelling between cultivars at harvest time and to give a longer sales period. Bed dimensions facilitate ease of mechanised trimming, counting, spraying, and spray calculations. A skilled workforce is a very valuable asset so time has been spent planning how best to use their skills and maintain their job satisfaction.

FOCUS ON QUALITY

Everyone claims to be a quality producer, but who is the judge. There are many definitions of quality, but to me the simplest, yet deepest definition is the following workplace sign that I spotted on a nursery several years ago. "Quality is a smiling customer."