



# 2002

## Spring Season Review

Find out what growers from around the United States and Canada had to say about successful crops, pricing, weather and other topics during the 2002 spring season.

By Elizabeth Pensgard and Brandi D. Thomas

From droughts and fires to unusually cool temperatures on the side of nature, to recession, corporate earnings fraud and the impending threat of terrorism on the side of man, circumstances this year may have been enough to make you want to hide in a cave until things improve. And though some growers may have wanted to, no one did; despite bad weather, poor plant quality or low consumer confidence, they went forward with the same resilience that has continued to make them successful year after year. *GPN* interviewed growers across the United States and Canada to assess the spring season from various points of view — here's what we found out.

### 1. Which varieties or plant categories performed better than you anticipated?

"Proven Winners, definitely. I think people are sick of geraniums; they are not selling half as well as they used to. I think people are looking for something a little bit out of the ordinary, not stuff that's been around for years and years and years. [Proven Winners] is also doing a tremendous amount of marketing. [Customers] are not asking for it by name, but everyone seems to be more familiar with them than they were a few years ago." —Susan Cadogan, owner/grower, Cadogan's Corner Greenhouses, Hopkinton, R.I.

"The big growth for us has been in perennials. Hanging baskets and planters have always been big with us and then just the regular run of bedding plants." —Charlie Sprout, owner, Sprout's Greenhouse, Lander, Wyo.

"It's hard to keep things like Bacopa in stock; we keep increasing our numbers, and they keep increasing their buying." —Dorothy Bartlett, co-owner, Bartlett's Ocean View Farm Inc., Nantucket, Mass.

"Supernova from Proven Winners did a whole lot better than I thought it would, and the stuff we got from Simply Beautiful did better this year than last year." —Dave Velde, head grower, Berns Greenhouse, Middletown, Ohio

Liz Marcone, perennial grower for Bartlett's Ocean View Farm, picks out 'Casa Blanca' lilies for sale. Bartlett's was one of the lucky ones whose production was not greatly affected by adverse weather conditions — and whose sales fared better than last year's.

"Grasses surprised us; there were a couple of grasses that we couldn't keep up with demand. We grow a lot of little things like little blue stem and prairie dropseed, which were huge sellers this year." —Harlan Hamernik, owner, Bluebird Nursery Inc., Clarkson, Neb.

### 2. Which varieties or plant categories performed worse than you anticipated?

"Roses. Growers think they're hard to grow." —Danny Takao, president, Takao Nursery, Fresno, Calif.

"Regal begonias were disappointing." —Dennis Bengert, owner/operator, Bengert Greenhouses, W. Seneca, N.Y.

"Geraniums and tuberous begonias." —Garnette Monnie, owner, Edwards Greenhouse, Boise, Idaho

### 3. How did the weather in your area affect your production?

"Weather didn't help matters a whole lot; we were slowed down more towards the end of May but made up for it in June. The heat messed us up a bit for extended sales, but it wasn't a bad spring." —Richard Anton, owner/manager, Anton's Greenhouses Inc., Pleasant Prairie, Wis.

"It was busy up until all the fires and the drought, and then sales just died and killed us. Every place we sell to at the late end-season was on fire or out of water. [The weather] put a clamp on the season pretty bad. We went from being ahead from the year before to probably being behind \$100,000, or about 10 percent. We will not be able to recoup those losses." —Jack Manning, owner, Manning's Greenhouse, Kirtland, N.M.

"We had some rain for a bit of an extended period in April or May, and I think the cool temperatures definitely affected things. They slowed down sales so that things didn't move on a regular schedule; it seemed like things were moving along and then we got that cold weather, and everything came to a standstill." —Susan Cadogan, owner/grower, Cadogan's Corner Greenhouses, Hopkinton, R.I.

"It really had little impact. We had a bit tougher winter than we've had in a couple years as far as cold and extremes. Now we're running into a drought problem, as a lot of Colorado is in a disaster area. The fires have cut down on retail sales some. If the drought continues the way it is right now, it's going to be very difficult — water restrictions." —John Pinder, general manager, Little Valley Nursery, Brighton, Colo. ♦

"We cut back a little on our production. We didn't get all of our second planting in because of cold weather. [We lost] probably \$50,000, about 10 percent." —*Michael Rinzema, Rinzema Greenhouse Inc., Grand Rapids, Mich.*

"We had a slow start because of the cool weather. April is our biggest month, and we did have an incredible April, but we were a bit behind in spite of that because of windy weather. It's hard on the retailers more than the growers. We surpassed last year's sales by the end of June and had a nice increase. Now we're having drought conditions, and we're spending a little more time trying to keep the plants cool and happy. We do have water restrictions; we're doing our best not to over-water anything." —*Harlan Hamernik, owner, Bluebird Nursery Inc., Clarkson, Neb.*

#### **4. How were your prices in 2002 compared to 2001? Did they hold throughout the season?**

"Possibly up 3-5 percent." —*Donald Anderson, owner, Anderson's Greenhouse, Franklin, Pa.*

"I didn't change them at all because I had raised them in 2001 due to gas and heat prices." —*Richard Anton, owner/manager, Anton's Greenhouses Inc., Pleasant Prairie, Wis.*

"For the most part, it stayed the same. It started out a different year mainly because of the economy and 9/11 — people were not going to be spending as much." —*Susan Cadogan, owner/grower, Cadogan's Corner Greenhouses, Hopkinton, R.I.*

"They've been more or less the same at least for the first quarter of the year. You can't do too much [price-raising] since the market determines it, and it's what the salesmen can get. We have been getting a little more creative in the shipping; we have an easy-shipping platform and have been asking more for the whole thing." —*David Pfohl, production planner, Aldershot Greenhouses Ltd., Burlington, ON, Canada*

"We went up an average of about 5 percent across the board. It hasn't

really restricted any sales as far as we can tell." (*John Pinder, general manager, Little Valley Nursery, Brighton, Colo.*)

"We raised certain prices in 2001, and we raised them again in certain areas in 2002. We tried to pick out those things where our cost production was rising. Other things we raised up to 10 percent." —*Harlan Hamernik, owner, Bluebird Nursery Inc., Clarkson, Neb.*

"Our prices increased by 10 percent. Prices held well until the very end of the season when we had our closeout sale." —*Garnette Monnie, owner, Edwards Greenhouse, Boise, Idaho*

#### **5. Do you have your own branding program, or do you grow other branded product? How effective was it this past season?**

"We grow about everything that's on the market. Flower Fields, Proven Selections...sales of the new brands are always better than the old standards because customers expect more from these selections." —*Donald Anderson, owner, Anderson's Greenhouse, Franklin, Pa.*

"We use all of them. Proven Winners would probably be the biggest one, and The Flower Fields. [Sales] are really good. I don't get people coming in asking for Proven Winners, but I get people coming in asking for Bacopa — blue Bacopa, pink Bacopa." —*Richard Anton, owner/manager, Anton's Greenhouses Inc., Pleasant Prairie, Wis.*

"We do have our own logo and tags and stuff, but we don't push the brand. Hines and Monrovia are two of our bigger suppliers, and of course, Monrovia sells like crazy." —*John Pinder, general manager, Little Valley Nursery, Brighton, Colo.*

"People are much more interested in quality than they are brands. We get a lot of Proven Winners and stuff like that in, but the stuff that performs sells. Some of [the brands] have been exceptionally good, like 'Purple Wave'." (*Charlie Sprout, owner, Sprout's Greenhouse, Lander, Wyo.*)

“We carry Proven Winners and some Flower Fields — a little bit of everything. We don’t tend to have people necessarily coming in asking for Proven Winners or Flower Fields. They come in looking for the plant they want.” (Dorothy Bartlett, co-owner, Bartlett’s Ocean View Farm Inc., Nantucket, Mass.)

“We take selections out of Proven Winners and Simply Beautiful and Flower Fields; we pick the stuff we like and feel performs better in this area, and then we put it under our title of ‘Berns Select.’ We use those tags on the product so that the people know what it is, and also, we tell them this is what we feel performs better in this area.” —Dave Velde, head grower, Berns Greenhouse, Middletown, Ohio

“We use our own logo, though we aren’t really aggressive about it. Some retailers want the world to think they grow everything even though they don’t plant a seed. So we’re flexible. We try to get along with everyone, but we do put our logo on our labels.” —Harlan Hamernik, owner, Bluebird Nursery Inc., Clarkson, Neb.

### **6. How were your relationships with your retail customers? What is the key factor that made them successful?**

“Excellent. I work with them and help them out, like when they’re not able to pay right away, and we work with them on programs. We’re not a huge business, but we’ve been here and we’ve had a rapport with the same people for a lot of years. We try to be as helpful as we can and work with the florists and the garden centers in our area. Customer service is definitely one of our pluses. You can always replace a bad plant, but I can’t help it if somebody’s been rude to [the customer].” —Karen Clesen, part owner, Bay West Nursery Inc., Naples, Fla.

“Really good. My salesman gets along with all of them pretty well, and we try to make sure we deliver a higher-quality product than what they can get from those that supply mass merchandisers because that’s the only way we can compete since we have to have a higher price. I’m selling pretty much everything I can raise when the weather’s right.” —Jack Manning, owner, Manning’s Greenhouse, Kirtland, N.M.

“Very good. I think it’s having a good-quality plant and standing behind

what you sell. If you have excellent plants, you hope that people will come back for more and that you give them good information. We do have a lot of customers who keep on coming back.” —Susan Cadogan, owner/grower, Cadogan’s Corner Greenhouses, Hopkinton, R.I.

“I think not too bad. The quality of our mums could be better; we’ve had to work a bit harder to move them. There are certain flare-ups over trucking, like with Wal-Mart. They can move a massive amount of product in a short period of time. It’s been relatively smooth so far.” —David Pfohl, production planner, Aldershot Greenhouses Ltd., Burlington, ON, Canada

“We try to be customer-driven and very customer-friendly whether it be wholesale or retail.” —Dennis Bengert, owner/operator, Bengert Greenhouses, W. Seneca, N.Y.

“We have very good relationships because we don’t use brokers. We put out a decent catalog with lots of color and lots of instructions, and everything is marked for how to use it. Then our staff develops a relationship with these [customers] over many years; we’re part of their family and vice versa. We try to make them understand that they need to trust us as we trust them — that’s the way to do business. You have to make the customer successful before you can be successful in this industry.” —Harlan Hamernik, owner, Bluebird Nursery Inc., Clarkson, Neb.

### **7. How will you use your experiences from the 2002 spring season to improve next year?**

“First, remembering the bad times will keep us trim and efficient; second, remembering how important our customers and brokers are; third, remembering how very important our family and friends are; and fourth, being aggressive to help our customers with sell-through.” —Danny Takao, president, Takao Nursery, Fresno, Calif.

“Probably more signage. We have a little problem here because we’re moving things around so much that sometimes the signs don’t get caught up to where the product is. I’m short on space, so I move things in the greenhouse, then outside. Hopefully when I get a chance

in the spring, when we start selling, I can get more outside and set up display areas — that is sometimes rough because we're starting up a wholesale business, and we're shipping out already. I may go back and try that Proven Winners thing that they had on The Weather Channel." — *Richard Anton, owner/manager, Anton's Greenhouses Inc., Pleasant Prairie, Wis.*

"I think we'll excel in moving on with our orchids. We're downsizing some of the more generic items, like ficus trees and things that aren't really special items — things that you can get if you went to Home Depot." — *Karen Clesen, part owner, Bay West Nursery Inc., Naples, Fla.*


"That's the \$99 question I'm working on right now. The biggest thing is the weather, and you can't predict that. Durango, Colo., and Show Low, Ariz., are big June sales areas, and when both places had those big fires, it just shut everything down. Right now, we're worried about fall because all our fall crop goes to Phoenix; if they continue to not get enough rain and they slap water restrictions on Phoenix this fall, then I'm really up a creek because there's nowhere else to go with the product. And we do probably 100,000 geraniums for the fall season for Phoenix." — *Jack Manning, owner, Manning's Greenhouse, Kirtland, N.M.*

"I think I'm going to cut down on some of my numbers for this coming year. It just seems like most of my customers did not buy as much as they normally do, so I don't want to end up being stuck with anything." — *Susan Cadogan, owner/grower, Cadogan's Corner Greenhouses, Hopkinton, R.I.*

"I'm not so sure that the spring season taught us a whole lot, but now we're having to deal with some drought issues that Denver never anticipated. So I guess what I've learned there is to try to look a little further ahead on some of these longer-term issues like water in our area. We'll probably expand our marketing areas outside of the drought areas. If Wyoming, New Mexico and Colorado are in the

same throes of drought as this year, we'll have to go east and try to compete with some of the growers in East Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri." — *John Pinder, general manager, Little Valley Nursery, Brighton, Colo.*

"There may be an increase in

larger containers — 4-and 8-inch — and a decrease in some flat material. It seems like the trend is going toward a larger pot — instant gratification. We are probably going to increase our larger pot program." — *Dave Velde, head grower, Berns Greenhouse, Middletown, Ohio* 

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