

# How Was Your Spring?

Every spring is a big question mark for growers: Will sales be up or down? How are profits going to be affected this year? What kind of an impact will the economy have on consumers? How will the weather be? Read on to see what happened for our readers this year.

By Tim Hodson and Shanna Casey

**N**ow that spring 2010 is in the books, we wanted to find out how growers have fared this year.

We surveyed more than 200 *GPN* subscribers to get an idea of how their spring season went. After a tough 2009, we wanted to know how their 2010 sales and profits had changed compared to last year.

We also talked to several growers at OFA Short Course last month and asked them to comment on the spring season.

Overall, it seems like growers did OK this year. Not great, but not horrible either.

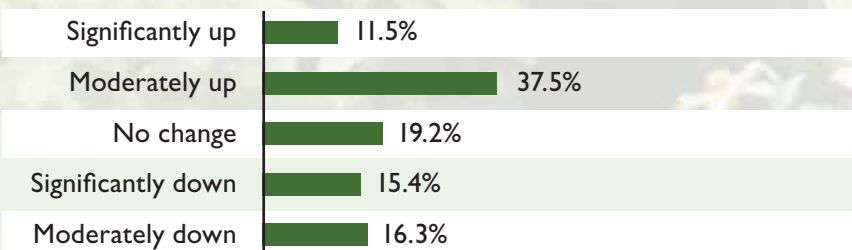
As it does every year, weather played a huge role. Spring arrived in late February down South and in March in some of the northern regions and some growers were able to capitalize on that early arrival.

But Mother Nature was not as kind in May. It was cool and wet, and many growers were forced to give back some of their March and April gains.

When the final numbers were in, growers confirmed that they are a determined (and optimistic) bunch. No matter how good or bad their spring season was, they are always thinking about next year. As Riverview Flower Farm's Rick Brown said, "We will be pushing daisies until we are pushing up daisies."



How were your spring *sales* as of June 1 compared to the same period in 2009?



Almost half of the growers said their spring sales were up compared to spring 2009. Nineteen percent said this year's sales were the same as last year.

When asked about spring 2010, responses varied from extremely upbeat ("We hope next year is as good as this year!") to unenthusiastic ("Glad it's over" and "Looking for a better 2011.")

Depending on where they were located, several growers mentioned that the season had started off strong (and early) but tapered off by May.

Here is a sampling of some of the other comments we heard from growers:

- "This spring was crazy. Sales topped out early in April, and if we hadn't replanted early, we would have missed out on an excellent opportunity for sales."
- "Spring was early here and we were ready!"
- "Sales were OK up until Mother's Day, then sales dropped off significantly."

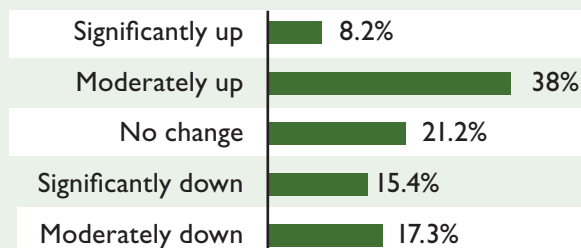




**“We had a slow start in March due to the cool weather down in Texas but May was our biggest month ever. When June and summer came around, that slowed us down a bit. But May was BIG — the biggest ever. [For the Year] we expect this year to be pretty much like last year. We had hopes of being up eight to 10 percent, but we are going to have to push some product into the market in the fall to make up for June.”**

— Jim Berry, J. Berry Nursery, Grand Saline, Texas

### How were your spring **profits** as of June 1 compared to the same period in 2009?

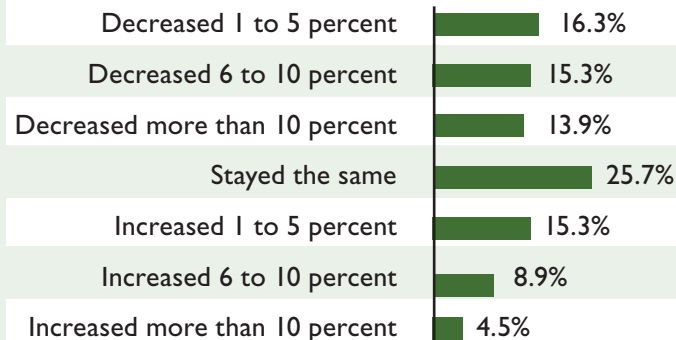


Growers reported that their profits followed the same trend that their spring sales did.

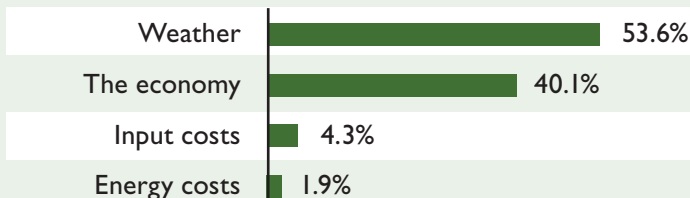
- “Overhead costs were up this year. Water, energy and input costs were up by at least 5 percent this year.”
- “Overhead costs increased. We had to raise retail prices to compensate for greater overhead costs, but customers did not appear to notice.”



### How much did your **production shrink** change from 2009 to 2010?



### What had **the most impact** on your sales this spring?



According to respondents, the biggest factors for sales this spring were the weather (54 percent) and the economy (40 percent).

- “Biggest April we have ever had because we had such great weather.”
- “Spring was very good but now the rain has slowed sales down.”
- “It’s all about the weather, especially on the weekends.”
- “It snowed on Mother’s Day.”



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“With the winter that we had in Florida, we didn’t know where [sales] were going to go. It was five months of the worst El Niño weather, with freezing temperatures throughout the state. Then spring started, and we could actually have sold more if we’d had [the product]. Business was brisk! May weather was sweet. We didn’t skip a beat, every day up through July. We are still strong. We are happy with where we are.”

— Rick Brown, Riverview Flower Farm, Riverview, Fla.

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## The economy also played a role:

- “Customers are more conservative and buying less at each visit.”
- “People do not have the money to spend on plants like they have in the past.”
- “Customers are more price aware than in the past — more shopping, less buying.”
- “Rainy spring weather, late frosts, uncertain economy but people planting more vegetables and edibles.”

## A few growers also mentioned energy costs:

- “The extended cold weather in February and into March significantly affected the amount of propane we had to purchase for heating our spring crop. This affected our





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"Our spring was great, even with all of the doom and gloom [being reported]. The only part that was down was our trees. As far as annuals, perennials and hard goods, and our floral department sales are concerned, they were all up. We were real thrilled with our spring sales. We are a grower/retailer, and I am the grower, so I have complete control over my product.

"I am a perfectionist, so the product has to be just perfect [before it goes to retail]. It *has* to be better than anyone else's. June was not bad. We were happy with June. April was excellent, but we weren't ready for that — the product wasn't quite there yet. It is hard to get it ready that early. But we are thrilled with this spring."

— Mike McCabe, McCabe's Greenhouse & Floral, Lawrenceburg, Ind.



"Our spring season in West Virginia is about like other places in the Midwest and middle Atlantic. It started out well in April, but I think we gave some of it back in June."

— Bobby Barnitz, Bob's Market & Greenhouses, Mason, W. Va.

"We had a good spring season. We were really encouraged about a lot of our product lines. We grow a lot of cactuses and succulents, and they have been highly and widely received. We have been deep into the vegetable business — that has had very good store comps this spring. Overall, our [retail] customers have pushed [our] products very well, and we have benefited from that."

— Ken Altman, Altman Plants, Vista, Calif.

expenses, so even though we had better sales in the spring, we had less profit."

- "Same struggle with decreased market keeping us from raising prices to account for rising costs. Also need to invest in energy-saving equipment and marketing even though we have no money to do that."

Input costs were a factor for some:

- "We have seen an uptick in sales this spring and early summer; however, costs, particularly labor, have gone up significantly, essentially wiping out any gains." ☺

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