

Promotion is BUDDING in the Hort Industry

The best-attended session at this year's Ohio Short Course wasn't about new varieties, and it wasn't chaired by a well-known Ph.D. It was an open forum grower panel that attracted over 700 participants to discuss a new OFA-sponsored, industry-wide initiative to increase plant sales.

By Bridget White

Commercial growers have suffered several hard hits this year: outrageous energy prices, poor spring sales and a down economy, to name a few. And because the hits keep coming, some people in the industry have started investigating how to raise consumer awareness about and demand for flowers.

The result so far is a two-part proposal referred to collectively as America In Bloom. And, if the reception at Short Course is any indication, this initiative is gaining momentum. Those of you involved with the former Bedding Plants International (BPI) may be familiar with the name America In Bloom, but the concept has changed into a hot new idea that has the industry talking: for better or for worse.

WHAT IS AMERICA IN BLOOM?

On March 6, 2001, a group of industry leaders — representing growers, distributors and manufacturers — gathered together in Oberlin, Ohio to discuss the present state and future of the greenhouse industry in North America. It

was the general consensus of the 25 or so in attendance that a unified effort to promote our industry was in everyone's best interest. The vehicle identified to accomplish this promotional venture is America In Bloom.



AMERICA in BLOOM
Planting pride in our communities!

America In Bloom is a new initiative the greenhouse floriculture industry is launching to promote flowering plants to the public.

Seeds for a promotional of this type were planted last year when BPI decided it would organize a national beautification contest modeled after Canada's successful Communities In Bloom. The goal is to stimulate more demand for flowering plants while boosting civic pride and improving the quality of life.

More recently, industry leaders decided the America

In Bloom concept holds a great deal of potential beyond the contest as a collective marketing pro-

gram to promote annuals, perennials and potted flowering plants nationally. With strong funding, America In Bloom could expand to become a multitude of promotional efforts, including consumer-directed

America In Bloom FAQs

How will America In Bloom be funded?

Growers and allied industry supporters are raising initial startup money. The goal is \$250,000. The next step is for growers to demonstrate support for the program to container manufacturers and ask them to facilitate supply chain assessments. America In Bloom is suggesting container manufacturers raise their prices 2 percent to generate \$6-10 million for marketing. This will not be a line-item assessment; it will be built into the costs of materials and passed on down the chain to consumers. America In Bloom estimates the cost to growers is one penny on a flat that retails for \$7.00.

Is this funding legal?

America In Bloom checked with legal advisers who determined that private companies could give as much as 10 percent of their revenues to not-for-profit organizations, such as America In Bloom. There's no limit on contributions made to for-profit organizations.

How is this different than a promotion order?

State and national promotion orders are voted on by the industry and enforced by the government. For example, USDA administers the dairy and beef promotion orders. America In Bloom will be voluntary assessments by participating container manufacturers acting on behalf of their customers.

How will participants be held accountable and the program assure fairness?

An independent firm will audit collections by participating manufacturers. The assessment will not be an isolated line item, but built into the cost of goods. This way, no one has the option of choosing not to pay. The program will only be fair if everyone pays.

Where can I send my contribution?

Please make checks out to AIB Escrow Account, OFA Services, 2130 Stella Ct., Suite 200, Columbus, OH 43215-1033. For more information, phone OFA at (614) 487-11217 or E-mail ofa@ofa.org.

Information provided by America In Bloom.

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HANNAY REELS

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national advertising campaigns and public relations and point-of-sale branding. The initial focus will be on spring flowering plants and then expand to other floriculture crops.

HOW WILL IT WORK?

This is an industry-led initiative of suppliers, brokers, growers, retailers, educators and press. Which means that all decisions about funding, distribution and organization will be made from within the industry for the benefit of the industry.

The promotional portion of America In Bloom will be overseen by The America In Bloom Task Force, a group of growers, suppliers and industry association leaders who have organized to launch the initiative. Steering the task force are president Ron Pierre and board members Dick Bonner, John Gaydos, Delilah Onofrey and Jack Schmidt. The task force has purchased the rights to America In Bloom from BPI, and an independent America In Bloom organization has been set up, housed by the Ohio Florists' Association (OFA). Growers and allied industry supporters are raising seed money. The goal is \$250,000.

Once the initial seed money is collected, it will be used to organize a more extensive and on-going collection effort, which will fund a national promotional campaign. The funding concept being proposed is a charge collected by horticulture container manufacturers. This charge would range from 2-5 percent of a manufacturer's selling price and would be included in the container manufacturer's invoice to their customers. The collected funds would be passed on to America In Bloom and used for promotional advertising. In concept, container manufacturers will collect the charge and the impact will be passed down the line to the consumer.


The reason container manufacturers were chosen as the collection vehicle is that the group felt it was the fairest, most direct and simplest method of implementation. All growers involved in the first two "brainstorming" meetings were adamant that a higher price for containers was acceptable as long as their neighbors or competitors were assessed the identical surcharge. According to the Task Force, a 5 percent increase in container costs probably equates to a less than 1/2 of 1 percent increase in the finished wholesale price of floricultural products.

A separate committee, chaired by Onofrey under OFA, will continue to organize the America In Bloom contest. In general, the contest rides the rising wave of "civic pride" many communities have been experiencing the past few years. By sponsoring a contest, America In Bloom can foster that civic pride through horticulture, and in the process, promote flowers and gardening as a way of life.

The first contest is in partnership with Canada: Four Canadian cities will mentor four U.S. cities. Awards will be presented during the Communities In Bloom symposium in Saint-John, NB, September 21-22.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Since few of these proposals and ideas have been finalized, there is still plenty of time for everyone in the floriculture industry to ask questions or voice their concerns. For more information about America In Bloom or to learn how to contribute or participate, contact any Task Force member, including Bridget White, *GPN* managing editor (847/391-1004).

To explore the possibilities and the ramifications of this effort, *GPN* will be running a series of articles over the next few months that will examine the pros and cons of the program, grower and industry reactions, and any new developments in implementation. If you have any comments or questions about America In Bloom or how it could affect your business, please feel free to use *GPN* as an open forum; we will gladly include your letters in our coverage of the initiative. 

Industry news continues on page 84.

Bridget White is managing editor of *GPN*.