



Investing In Education

Investing in your and your growing staff's education boosts your knowledge about crop production, pathogen and insect control, floriculture marketing and other business facets. See what events the industry offers to increase learning for everyone.

By Erik Runkle

People often associate an investment with money, such as the purchase of stocks, bonds or mutual funds, with the expectation that they will become more valuable with time. Many of us make other kinds of investments, such as in a college education. Earning a college degree takes at least four years and has an ever-increasing monetary cost. However, salary studies clearly show that the return on investment for a college education is quite high.

Greenhouse companies routinely invest in their businesses by purchasing and installing automated equipment to reduce labor costs (such as automatic transplanters and watering systems), retractable energy curtains to reduce heat loss at night and lighting systems to shorten cropping times. This requires a capital outlay to pay for the new equipment, but in some instances, the investment pays for itself in a short period of time (3-5 years).

Another kind of investment is investing in your and your growing staff's education. There are a variety of ways to boost your knowledge about crop production, pathogen and insect control, floriculture marketing and other business facets. Unfortunately, many growers don't take advantage of educational opportunities, such as state and regional grower conferences and university events. Attending seminars that contain research-based information is an efficient way to "get up to speed" on particular topics and give you new ideas on greenhouse production.

Upcoming Events

There are many excellent conferences planned for this summer and autumn, and I strongly encourage you and your employees to participate in at least one. The OFA Short Course in Columbus, Ohio, July 14-17, offers seminars on a range of greenhouse production and management topics (visit www.ofa.org for more information). I believe the seminars alone are worth the investment of


your time and money, and the trade show and networking opportunities are icing on the cake. Some other upcoming conferences that deserve special mention are the Southeast Greenhouse Conference, June 20-23, and the Canadian Greenhouse Conference, Oct. 3-4.

Another educational opportunity, particularly for new greenhouse employees, is the Floriculture College of Knowledge certificate program. This program consists of 12 4-hour educational modules that are usually taken over a 1- to 2-year period. University faculty, staff and graduate students teach the courses. Participants accumulate a library of resources, including textbooks, handouts and class notes, which are useful for future reference. To date, greenhouses from 30 states have realized the value of this more intensive educational opportunity. For more information, visit www.hrt.msu.edu/cok.

Many of the leading floriculture universities also coordinate conferences and grower events on and off campus, including field days and research open houses. Given my bias as a university researcher and educator, I am a strong proponent of information that is impartial and based on research. Check out *GPN's* calendar of events and watch your E-mail for announcements of other upcoming conferences and events.

Keep Up With Change

It is no coincidence conference attendees and participants at educational events are often leaders of the industry. Growers at these progressive companies are thirsty for information on how to reduce mistakes, streamline production, produce new crops, manage pests and market their crops. What is the alternative? Grow crops the same way you did 10 or 20 years ago? Our industry is changing rapidly with the introduction of new crops, cropping techniques, chemicals and threats. The return on investment for the cost to attend an educational event can usually be recuperated by the implementation of just one new growing strategy.

I sincerely believe that investing in your education and the education of your employees is one of the best investments you can make for your business. Can you afford not to? 

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