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Flash Back

Approximately one year ago our industry was just learning about the *Ralstonia* outbreak that would ultimately destroy a company and cost approximately \$10 million. Fresh from a trip touring geranium production in Central America and sensitive to our industry's precarious position, I wrote a pretty long-winded "Editor's Report" (see the March 2004 issue of *GPN*) detailing the situation and urging everyone to get involved in the issues, their local association and our industry's political initiatives.

Back in February, I finally had a chance to put my money where my very large mouth is by attending my first ever SAF Congressional Action Days (CAD).

Held annually, this two-day event gathers together industry leaders from across the country to lobby members of Congress about legislation of importance to floriculture. It's a great event, and one that I think everyone in the industry should be part of.

CAD RECAP

We spent the first day of CAD in issue briefings and roll playing, trying to get a better understanding of the process and our responsibilities. Day two was spent on Capital Hill, and for my group, the Illinois delegation, that meant back-to-back appointments with aides and an occasional Congressperson. And I can't forget what is widely touted as the favorite reception on the Hill, where aides and Congresspeople come for drinks, eats and flowers.

It was a pretty busy two days, but I'm so glad I went. Not only do I now have a much better understanding of some of our major legislative pushes (H2A, association health-plans and the research initiative), but I honestly feel like I am part of the proverbial solution. Instead of just typing away at my

keyboard once a month about whatever issue is on my mind, I actually went out and tried to change things.

LOOKING FORWARD

In the midst of my excitement about taking part in the legislative process and helping out our industry, I begrudgingly faced the fact that CAD is probably the best example I've seen of our industry's apathy.

There were only about 120 people in attendance, and the majority of those were florists. We didn't even have attendees from every state. What kind of message are we sending to the states that had no attendees and did not get lobbied — that floriculture does not matter in that state?

Feedback from fellow attendees was that the conference used to draw a bigger crowd, but...and that's where everyone just trailed off because there really wasn't any answer as to why attendance had dropped. It's a great event, you get to meet very cool people and you help the industry. What more could you ask for?

I have since wondered if the low turnout, especially from growers, had anything to do with the association and its vastly florist membership. Maybe you were all thinking that the lobbying would be for florist issues that had nothing to do with you as a greenhouse grower. Not true! The four issues we lobbied on were for the entire industry, from florists to bedding plant growers to tree growers to landscapers.

Kudos to SAF for hosting such an event! I've already marked my calendar for next year and hope that my gentle prodding has encouraged some of you to do the same. Remember, if you don't take part in the process, you can't complain about its outcome. And if you don't want to wait until next year, check out ANLA's similar event, which is scheduled for July 17-21, at www.anla.org.

Bridget L. White

next month...

- New research on mealybugs and neonicotinoids
- Compilation of the industry's award-winning varieties
- The latest developments in greenhouse construction

plus...

- penstemon overview
- pesticide storage
- perennial geranium production