

Getting Back To My Roots



By Roger C. Styer

For the past nine years, most of you have known me through my consulting with greenhouse operations, speaking at seminars and writing articles in trade journals. These areas have kept me very busy and allowed me to meet a wide range of people and learn something every day. I feel I do my best work walking through greenhouses with growers, discussing how crops are growing and working on problems and production efficiency. But to do all of this, I have to travel the greater part of the year. And as any road warrior can tell you, traveling that much is no fun!

For the past year or so, I have had an idea floating around my head that I just could not get rid of, which means it is an idea you should act upon. So I have! This idea is to set up a second business of growing and selling field-grown summer cut flowers around my hometown. Sounds crazy, but here's my rationale for getting into this business:

- I wanted a business that would cut down on my travel for at least part of the year. I wanted to stay home a little more to spend time with my teenage daughter before she goes off to college.
- There is a definite need for fresh summer flowers in the general area where I live. We

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will be selling to retail florists, farmer's markets and specific businesses that want fresh cuts, such as restaurants and hotels. Additional options include a subscription bouquet service and pick-your-own.

- The aging baby boomer market is going retro. That means people are looking for things from when they were growing up. We will be focusing on some old-time flowers, as well as flowers that do not ship well from California and South America.

- I wanted a business that would get me back to my roots. I grew up with a father and grandfather who planted a lot of flowerbeds, as well as a large vegetable garden every year. I enjoyed getting my hands dirty working with the different plants, starting them from seed or transplants, and harvesting the fruits of my labors for others to enjoy. My best memory was of growing a lot of giant pumpkins, but as I headed off to college that fall they had not yet been harvested. My mom sent me a picture of the harvested pumpkins with a kindergarten class sitting on top of them. Those were some big pumpkins!

- I wanted a business that my daughter could work at during the summers while she is still in high school. I want her to learn the meaning of working for a living but still allow her to do things she may enjoy. Also, this means I don't need to get her a car to get to work.

- Finally, I wanted a business that I could grow and expand to possibly allow me to cut way back on my traveling and consulting. This would be my retirement business.

LEARNING THE BUSINESS

I have always had an interest in the field-grown cut flower business, as many people start by cutting flowers from their back yard. Sounds just like when I was growing up, only then I didn't know about the different outlets for selling flowers. I feel I can learn something everyday in this new business of growing and selling cut flowers. That is important to me as well!

My new business is called Country Fresh Flowers. We are leasing some land from a nearby greenhouse operation. This year we are starting with about ¼ acre but can expand up to 5 acres if the business takes off. We start planting in the field this month, growing on raised beds with drip tape and black plastic mulch and using netting to keep the flowers off the ground. Harvest and selling season will be from July until first frost, probably around the beginning of October. Ultimately, using perennials as well as annuals and using high tunnels (large cold frames) in the field, we can extend our growing and selling season from April to November. That will still allow me to consult with a number of growers from January to March but not feel like I need to kill myself traveling all over forever.

So, this year from May through September, I will be cutting back on some travel — not going to as many conferences or for as long as I would normally be gone. I will not be taking such long client trips, keeping them down to 2-3 days at a time. Even by lessening the amount of travel, I will still need to hire at least one full-time person, as well as some part-time people, including my daughter.

I wanted to write about my new business because of what I have said in previous columns about examining how much you want to expand your current business and how you balance out personal issues with business issues. I look at my second business as giving me more time at home to spend with my daughter, to get back into better physical condition and to return to my roots of getting my hands dirty. Besides, can you think of a more beautiful business to be in than growing, harvesting, treating and selling colorful cut flowers to people who truly enjoy your product? [GPN](#)

Roger Styer is president of Styer's Horticultural Consulting, Inc., Batavia, Ill. He can be reached by phone at (630) 208-0542 or E-mail at carleton@voyager.net.