

from the road

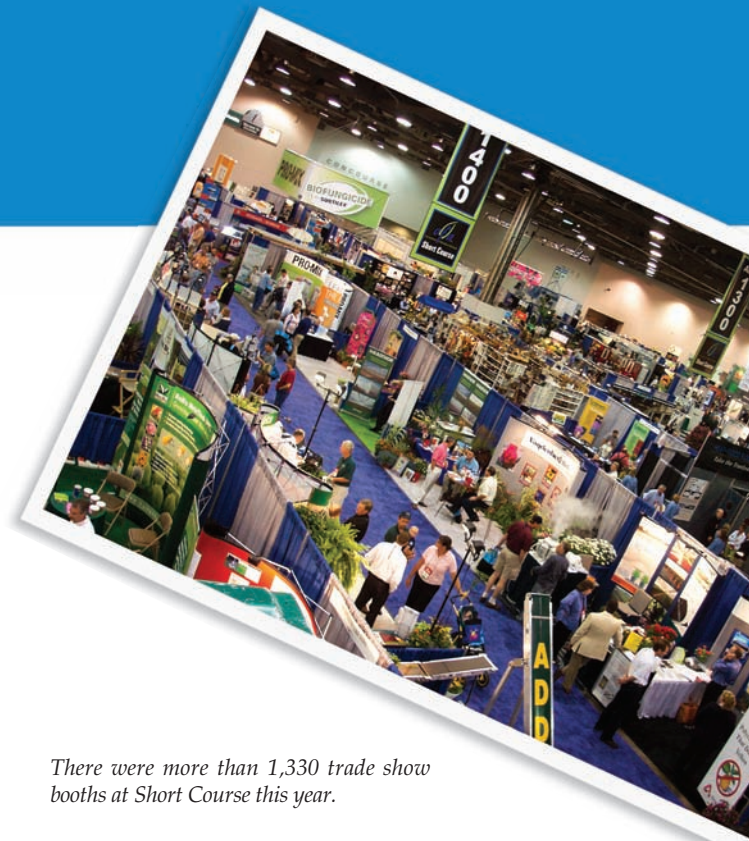
Recapping Short Course

Mergers and an industry-wide marketing initiative were among the hot topics at the 2006 OFA Short Course: From interesting new products to informative sessions and industry trends, find out what we saw, heard and experienced at this year's show.

By Meghan Boyer



Top: Nearly 250 industry professionals took part in Unplugged, which was designed as a place for young industry professionals to come together with other people their own age. Bottom: There were more than 120 educational seminars offered at Short Course this year.



There were more than 1,330 trade show booths at Short Course this year.

Floriculture professionals from around the globe once again headed to Columbus, Ohio, for this year's OFA Short Course held July 8-11. The OFA Short Course is known for its educational and trade show events and networking opportunities. Each year, exhibitors representing various sectors of the floriculture industry showcase their products and services for three days, and seminars are held throughout the 4-day event.

This year, attendees from nearly 30 countries took in more than 1,330 trade show booths, participated in more than 120 educational seminars, networked with peers and enjoyed themselves in downtown Columbus. With an assortment of seminars for growers, retailers, interiorscapers and florists, there was truly something for everyone in the floriculture industry.

At Short Course, everyone knows you can hear important industry information at the sessions and on the show floor. But there is also a lot to learn from talking with your peers: It's the best way to find out about the types of trends people see; where people think the industry is headed; and who moved where, bought whom and is building what. From industry trends and products to event highlights and news — here is a sampling of what we saw, heard and experienced at the show.

Much Ado About Mergers

This year, much of the talk centered on mergers — largely because the respective companies involved chose to announce their news just prior to or at the show. The speed at which these mergers were announced (one right after another) had people talking almost as much as the mergers themselves.

The week before the OFA Short Course, Ecke Ranch announced it was buying Oglevee Ltd. and integrating the two companies' production, sales, marketing, breeding and Oglevee's patented CVI clean stock system. While each company

maintained a booth, they both displayed signage reflecting the acquisition.

The American Floral Endowment (AFE) and Floriculture Industry Research & Scholarship Trust (FIRST) merger announcement came just days before Short Course, which was perfect timing: The newly combined AFE was able to hold an informational session at Short Course and field questions about the merger at their booths.

Announced at Short Course, Syngenta Professional Products, a global agribusiness company and supplier of crop protection and seed products, entered into an agreement to buy Conrad Fafard, Inc., which produces packed growing media for professional ornamental and consumer retail markets. This unexpected merger was announced on the second day of the show and quickly became the biggest news of the event.

Another merger, announced at Short Course, is between PeaceTree Farm and Gro 'n Sell, two young plant producers in Pennsylvania.

Marketing Initiative Discussion

Charles Kremp, president of the Floral Marketing Funding Initiative Coalition (FMFIC), led a presentation regarding a proposed industry-wide marketing initiative. Approximately 25 people gathered on Tuesday, July 11, to listen to Kremp's presentation and discuss their views on the matter. Though attendees were enthusiastic about discussing new ways to increase industry consumption and promotion, the group's overall mood implied FMFIC is in for an uphill battle.

The proposed plan, which applies only to cut flowers at this time, would use a government template to design the initiative. By using the template, the initiative could pass if a majority of the people affected voted for it (unlike an individualized plan, which would need congressional approval). Currently, the Mango Association is the only initiative to use the template.

The coalition feels \$50 million is needed to affect change with a marketing initiative. Growers would fund the effort by contributing 5 percent of their sales. If enacted, this amount would be the highest percentage levied among national associations from other industries.

The tax would be assessed in two ways: For domestic wholesale production, growers would be taxed once the purchased goods leave their properties. For international trade, the tax would be levied as goods enter the United States at the cost of the recipient, which means retailers would have to pay 5 percent of future sales up front. Furthermore, those in the industry would not feel the benefits of the tax until approximately a year after they started paying it, when enough money would be collected to start promotions.

Trade Show Talk

The trade show seemed to go well for many people; overall, most vendors and attendees we talked to were happy with the event, and most agreed that Tuesday was the slowest day for the trade show. Aside from attendance, the two topics we heard discussed most frequently were a new event focused on young industry members and the increasing cost of energy.

A new Short Course event proved to be quite popular this year: Designed to be a place for young industry professionals to come together with other people their own age, Unplugged was planned by OFA's Generation Next committee. Nearly 250 industry professionals were part of the fun on Monday night, July 10. The event featured a band, food, drinks and prize giveaways and took place at a restaurant near the convention center. People spent the night mingling, and while industry issues were prominent topics of conversation, there were plenty of people spending time just getting to know one another.

At Unplugged and throughout the four days of Short Course, industry members wanted to know how everyone was coping with increased energy costs, especially since fuel prices raced toward all-time highs in many areas of the country just prior to the event. From increased airfare for business travel to high heating and cooling costs to increased plastic prices — no one seemed to be immune to increased rates. Quite a few growers were considering installing wood-burning furnaces to help lower costs. Others talked about grow-

ing crops cooler, cutting back on labor and charging delivery surcharges as ways to save money.

Seen At The Show


There is no shortage of products at the OFA Short Course: From media to chemicals to automation equipment and more — there is something for everyone. With all the offerings, it is impossible to mention each product at the show, so here are a few that stood out.

Dual-purpose rack. This wire rack, called Slide Show, stood out because growers can load, ship, display and sell all on one cart. When drawn in, the cart's shelves are appropriate for loading and shipping; the loaded shelves can then slide out to create a display. Inno-craft, the manufacturer (www.inno-craft.com), gives growers the option of replacing their posts and shelves with Slide Show components or purchasing an entire rack.

Foam insulation and shade system. Sunarc launched its On-Demand Insulation & Shade System for double-layer, air-inflated polyethylene greenhouses at the OFA Short Course. The system works by infusing liquid foam between the two layers of double poly; the foam can insulate during cold weather and shade during hot weather. Managed by computer software and able to be controlled remotely, the On-Demand system automatically stops making foam when it is no longer needed. The foam is designed to dissipate by itself, and sprinklers help wash away any residue. You can find more information about this system at www.sunarc.ca.

Nature-friendly containers. Biopots, manufactured by Bellan International Limited (www.biopots.com), are made from fibrous wastes such as bamboo, straw and rice husks; they are designed to be 100-percent biodegradable. The pots' life spans are approximately one year outdoors with a plant, three years indoors with a plant and 10 years indoors without a plant. Consumers can place them indoors, outdoors or even directly in the ground. The containers are available in a variety of colors and can be used in greenhouse conditions.

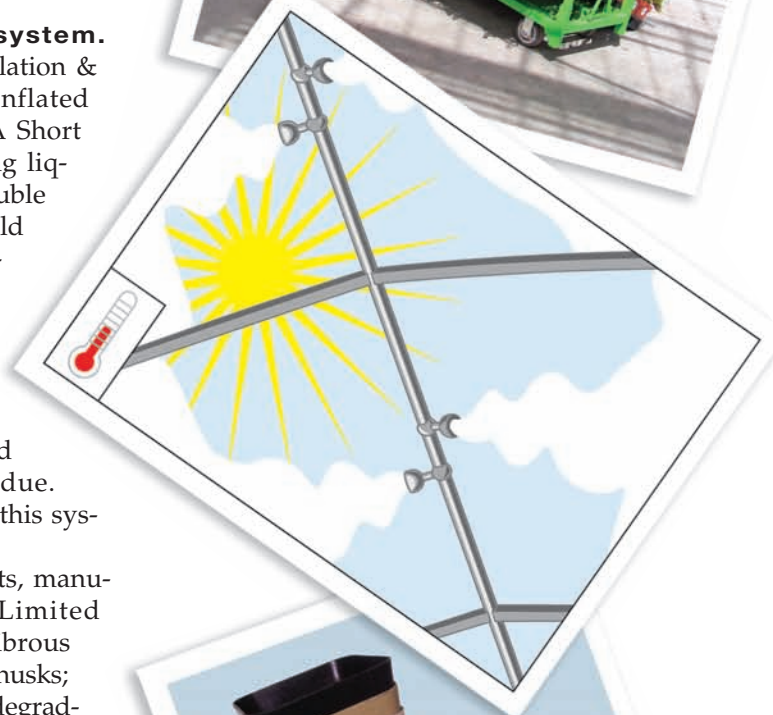
See You Next Year

For those who like to plan ahead, get your calendars ready: The 2007 OFA Short Course will take place July 14-17 in Columbus, Ohio. To learn more, visit www.ofa.org. 

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Left: Scott Stiles, the 2006 GPN/Nexus Intern Scholarship winner, received his award from Bridget White, GPN's editorial director, and Mike Porter, president and co-owner of Nexus, at the annual GPN reception at Short Course. Top: The Slide Show cart is designed so growers can load, ship, display and sell all on one cart. Middle: This system works by infusing liquid foam between two layers of double poly; the foam can insulate during cold weather and shade during hot weather. Bottom: These containers are made from fibrous materials and are designed to be 100-percent biodegradable.