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Working Through The Opportunities

As you can probably imagine, given the controversial nature of the editor's report in the September and October issues of *GPN*, my phone and E-mail have been filled the past month with grower, supplier and retailer comments.

(Turn to page 82 for a sampling of the letters I've received.)

What hearing from so many people tells me is that the problems our industry is currently facing with mass merchandisers is on everybody's mind. In fact, the information I have been printing in my column has come directly from growers affected by the new policies. And it came from lots of growers. It seems that you can't get a group of industry people together these days without the conversation eventually turning to the boxes. Our industry obviously needs some resolution.

A FEW MORE COMMENTS

I've gotten a lot of input since my last column, and most of it about Home Depot — some growers are saying that they enjoy working with Home Depot, some are saying Depot is the lesser of two evils, and some are using words I can't repeat to say that they want nothing to do with any of the mass merchandisers.

Despite conflicting reports from some growers and a memo touting Depot's desire to homogenize store appearances, I was glad to hear from Bob Jacobson, Home Depot's global buyer for green goods, that Depot has not mandated the removal of POP. Though an interview was denied, I understand from Jacobson, as well as other individual Depot

stores, that Home Depot has backed away from this policy somewhat, deciding not to pursue it on a national basis at this time. I guess the Northwest experiment provided good data after all.

It's also nice to hear that Depot has a large number of existing poinsettia purchase orders in place for this winter. Corporate's reasoning for pulling fall POs is now being attributed to the unmanageable 65-degree highs and 45-degree lows that made for "bad weather" in the Northwest this fall. Whatever the cause, the growers I've heard from in that part of the country are relieved that this experiment is also over.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

I'm not sure any of us can really know what was going on at Home Depot this fall, but I chalk this up as a win for the industry.

One thing I do know is that our industry now has the ear of one of the most influential buyers of green goods in the world. Two months ago, the second biggest of the boxes was squeezing the life out of some of our growers; *GPN* told the giant all the things that individual growers couldn't, for fear of reprisal; and now, we have a dialog and some cooperation.

Are you familiar with Henry Kaiser's quote about problems? That "problems are opportunities in work clothes." It does seem that this crisis has developed into an opportunity for growers to stand together and make some progress with the boxes. I guess we should turn our attention to Wal-Mart next. GPN

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