

Getting Ahead of the Pack: Predicting Trends

So business is good, spring is behind us and summer is almost here — everyone is busy. Looking ahead? Are you getting your IPM program revised for the hottest time of the year and the

pests that are heat lovers? How much pesticides, herbicides and fungicides will you end up using to produce a salable, high-quality product?

If you've been in the industry for a while you might already have an idea ... but if you are new to the industry you are now at a crossroad. This happens also any time you start producing a new crop or decide to pursue a different market. What a big box retailer might want won't be the same as a landscaper. The inputs will change based on your customer needs. We have all seen this with the neonicotinoid situation.

How is it that you will come up with a formula that will maybe get you in the ballpark? Looking at the last few years, you might see a trend. Again, this will only be a prediction as every year we are faced with new diseases, pests, weather, along with many other factors that will change things in unforeseen ways. This year has been especially hard with wide swings in cold and dry, warm and wet throughout much of the country. The plants are taking a real hit.

SETTING YOURSELF APART

Do you have a plan for getting ahead of the competition? What will you do to make your business different? Why should somebody buy from you? What can you do to stand out and get to the head of the pack?

We've all been hearing about the recent tariff battles — even those of us who do not “Tweet.” How much of an impact do you think it will have on your business ... minor or major? You might find yourself paying more for supplies, equipment, etc. Do you pass these increased input costs on to your customers?

Health care is another unknown cost. Since we cannot predict what the government is doing, how is your business dealing with this? Ann and I keep seeing

increases every year, and we are reluctant to try and change anything since the entire basis of health care in the U.S. is a moving target.

What new crops are you banking on to catch the buyer's eye? We have one customer who specializes in tough-to-produce crops. That is how they get to the head of the pack. Did you attend California Spring Trials to see what is cutting edge in new plants? Attending other meetings like Cultivate also let you in on what is new and hot.

We will be at the Plug and Cutting Conference in Charlotte in September. Ann and I also have to figure out how to keep up and jump ahead whenever possible. So we attend many events

that are designed to keep our industry aware. Staying aware of the new pesticides can also help you provide a better product. It might be safer for the environments, produce a better crop through plant health benefits, satisfy our needs for biopesticides. Re-entry levels have been decreasing in many of the new products; residue is minimal since the formulations are changing and the longevity of their effects is amazing compared to what was normal 30 years ago. Some of the newest insecticides and fungicides can be effective for six to eight weeks following a single drench. That makes everyone happy.

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THE KEYS TO SUCCESS

Do you have a plan to differentiate your products and your business? Here are some of the keys to help get you to the head of the pack:

- Know where you are now and where you want to go — know your vision.
- Education — never miss an opportunity to learn something new.
- Go to meetings; getting out of your own backyard is the best way to get a new view of the world.
- Can you use some of the new technology, such as drones, to find water-stressed plants in a nursery?
- Keep an open mind, but be aware of your limitations.
- Develop resources, especially “experts.”
- Involve your employees; they are your eyes and ears and are integral to your success.
- Invest in your future — you must spend a little to make a lot.

Saving money is always a good idea — except when it keeps you from improving your products and your overall business. Don't short-change yourself or your employees when it comes to education. The only way to stay up to speed and speed ahead is through seeing something new. You can't do that from your own greenhouse bench. [gpn](#)



Chase Agricultural Consulting, LLC was formed in 2011 by Ann (A.R.) Chase and Mike Zemke. Ann has more than 35 years experience in research, diagnostics and practical consulting in plant pathology. She has been retired from the University of Florida since 1994 but remains on staff as a Professor Emeritus. Mike holds an Associate of Applied Science in manufacturing drafting and started his education in horticulture when he and Ann were married in 1995. He specializes in communications of all sorts within the industry.