

Tracking Crop Performance, Communication Is Key

As a company we at Smith Gardens are always looking forward to discover and implement new methods to improve our processes. Crop spec is one topic that is very important to us; this involves setting standards on what individual crops should look like at the time of ship.

Finding a way to easily communicate these standards throughout the company was a challenge. To remedy this we launched ET Grow in 2013 to create clarity of retail readiness that could easily be accessed throughout the company. The program allows us the ability to store three simple photos of each of our crops at three levels of retail readiness:

Stage 1 - Generally Not Shippable

Stage 2 - Minimum Shippable

Stage 3 - Push (needs to go this week)

Within each level there are specified details of what the plants should look like at each stage.

publishing using PowerPoint) and took up a massive amount of storage within our network. Now, when our planning team meets, they can log into ET Grow on a desktop and easily pull up photos of our product and see what it really looked like when it shipped.

DATA COLLECTION

All of this talk about photography and creating clarity using pictures I almost forgot to mention the ability to collect actual data and notes. Growers can scan a QR code and take specific notes about individual crops. Multiple notes can be taken on a single crop and each note is stored under the specific user.

In the past notes were taken and shared on various platforms — email, text, WeChat, Excel, Word — and it was a bit of a mess. Now all of the information is in one spot and easy to find. This has helped streamline the communication between our production and planning teams.



Sarita Cantu is marketing manager with Smith Gardens and a member of GPN's 40 Under 40 Class of 2019. She can be reached at sarita.cantu@smithgardens.com.

SETTING SPEC

Team members from various departments — including Production, Growing, and Sales — meet on a regular basis to discuss and set specs. It has been a great way to not only gain more perspective on what a crop should look like at the time of ship, but has also improved communication on a topic that is often subjective. It's an ongoing process as we grow thousands of items and every year we receive comments from the field that makes us review the specs to optimize shelf life and sales at the stores.

Once spec is set and photos are taken and uploaded into the program, our team can easily access the information from their phones using the 'Grow' app. Utilization of the app has reduced downtime, as our selection team no longer has to print out photos of the crop to communicate spec expectations. The app also has a scanner that will read the QR code, which enables the crews to more easily locate the crop.

PHOTO MANAGEMENT

You know that old saying, "A picture speaks a thousand words?" Well, we take that pretty seriously when it comes to teaching spec to our team. As a company we speak 10 different languages so clearly communicating crop spec can be difficult. When you show a photo of what the expectation is, it makes it easier for all. We also utilize the program to take and store photos of our product as we are shipping — for next year's planning purposes.

Previously, our process was extremely time consuming (uploading photos to folders, renaming each one and then

"Clear communication is key to reduce readiness confusion and turn subjectivity into objectivity ..."

The implementation of ET Grow has been very incremental and now, six years later, we are really beginning to utilize and take advantage of what it has to offer. We have "5 S'ed" crop data storage and cleared up communication of our spec using simple photos. It is as if our cluttered desks have been "Marie Kondo'ed" into a neat and organized, easily accessible, I-know-where-my-pen-is system that allows us to function better as a team.

Clear communication is key to reduce readiness confusion and, as much as humanly possible, turn subjectivity into objectivity to ensure quality products are shipped to our customers' stores. ET Grow has been of great help in providing a tool that effectively makes that communication easier. [gpn](#)