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# Grower News

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Editor John Esser

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## Join CFGW

If you have not yet joined the Commercial Flower Growers of Wisconsin now is the time! A full membership is still only \$100 per year and has so many benefits to you and your business. Contact a board member or John Esser by emailing [info@cfgw.org](mailto:info@cfgw.org), calling 608-244-3088 or writing to 5301 Portsmouth Way, Madison, Wisconsin 53714. **Join now!**

Editor

## Help

What do you want from the CFGW? How can CFGW help you and your business? Do you have program suggestions or speaker recommendations for the CFGW Fall Greenhouse Conference held in September, 2009 and 2010? What would you like to read in the newsletter? Do you want more information on culture, pesticide usage, organic or "green" growing, new varieties, cost accounting, etc.? Help us improve the CFGW! You may call, write or email any board member as well as John Esser. **Your input will improve CFGW!**

Editor

## China Trip

In November 2008 the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) invited a representative from the Wisconsin horticulture industry and the University of Wisconsin, and a representative from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) to speak at U.S.-China Agricultural Forum. The Forum was held in conjunction with the Cross-Strait Flower Expo and Agricultural Fair in Zhangzhou, Fujian Province, China. As a UW-Extension educator/agent, I was honored to represent our industry and the University. I traveled with Lora Klenke, DATCP Director of Agricultural Market Development Bureau. The goal of the trip was to promote horticultural business and academic exchanges between Wisconsin and China.

As the only "foreign" horticulture speaker, I was asked to focus my short (thirty minutes including interpretation time) presentation on "Trends in Wisconsin and American Horticulture and Floriculture". My thanks to John Esser, CFGW, Scott Sanford, UW-Extension, and others who helped me identify trends. Topics mentioned in the presentation included reducing energy costs, especially in greenhouse

production, biofuels, increase consumer demand for sustainably produced crops, branding for plant marketing, continuing consumer interest in containers and herbaceous perennials.

There has been a long standing successful exchange between northern China, the dairy industry, DATCP and University of Wisconsin Babcock Institute. The Chinese floricultural industry is interested in developing a similar relationship. This trip was the first step in potentially developing this relationship. Because this was the initial exchange and the trip was only six days, it ended up being much more diplomatic than horticultural.

Fujian Province is in southeastern China across the Taiwan Strait from Taiwan. The climate is subtropical monsoon maritime and 80% of the land is mountainous. The province is called the "Kingdom of Tea", ranking first in Chinese tea production. Fujian is a main producer of edible mushrooms. Tropical fruits and vegetables, like banana, pomelo and litchi, are also significant crops.

The Cross-Strait Flower Expo is held in the city of Zhangzhou. This city of 4.6 million people and five thousand square miles is known as "Hometown of Flowers and Fruits". Paperwhites are the symbol of the city because it is a major supplier of the world's paperwhites. In fact, we met several Dutch businessmen at Expo events. Other significant floriculture crops are orchids and camellias.

The Expo reminded me of the Chicago Flower Show. There were exhibit halls of orchids (especially *Phalaenopsis*) and foliage plants, bonsai, and flower arrangements. A trade show took up another large section of the Expo grounds. I saw booths for mushrooms,

fruits and juices, tea, and tropical plants. There were even carnival rides.

During our short stay (less than 48 hours) in Zhangzhou, we were treated as VIP's. It is quite a treat to be part of a motorcade with police escort, front row and dais seating at events, and "people" to show you around. But it also meant that I did not have time, or opportunity, to talk with Expo exhibitors, horticultural producers and other attendees. At the Expo we were accompanied by several dignitaries, so I mainly shook hands, smiled, briefly admired the exhibits and had my photo taken.

Through an interpreter I briefly spoke with two floriculture exhibitors. I'm not sure how accurate the translation was because my interpreter was not familiar with horticulture. The first exhibitor had won a number of awards for her tropical foliage plants. She pointed out the variegation along the leaf margins as a important trait. I noticed, however, that the variegations rarely were consistent through the plant, so I doubt the mutations were stable. The other grower I spoke with specialized in orchids. He showed me a *Phalaenopsis* with purple striped flowers and a wonderful chocolate fragrance. If it was interpreted correctly, he told me he propagates from plants collected in the wild.

As we traveled to and from the Expo grounds, we passed through the "flower village" of Zhangzhou. Both sides of the road for quite a distance were lined with small horticulture businesses. We were told the businesses were retail and wholesale. I observed businesses featuring containerized foliage plants, trees and shrubs and flowers. In the more rural areas there was field and container production of flowers, trees, cactus and foliage plants. Many of the plants were under hoops or shade cloth. The few

greenhouses I saw appeared to be older glass structures.

Although I was a little frustrated that I did not learn a lot about horticulture to share with you, I hope this might be the beginning of mutually beneficial relationship between Wisconsin Green Industry and China.

Barb Larson  
Kenosha County Hort. Extension Agent

## Chinese Delegation Visits Wisconsin

Two horticulture delegates from Fujian Province China visited Wisconsin on December 12, 2008. They visited two Wisconsin horticultural businesses in Burlington, Wisconsin with Wisconsin Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection's (DATCP) Lora Klinke and U.W. Kenosha County's Horticulture Extension Agent Barbara Larson. They first visited River Valley Ranch in Burlington a producer of mushrooms, heirloom vegetables and herbs. I met them at Northwind Farm on a 10 degree, sunny day and toured the perennial farm which except for a Christmas barn was closed for the season. Ms. LiLy Cai and Ms. Zhao Lin Ru, from the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade were interested in the way the plants were being held for the winter and what Northwind sells for perennials.

I asked about their interest in Wisconsin's Horticulture. Ms. LiLy said they were especially interested in mushroom growing and had members of their organization who were interested in producing them in the United States. She said Chinese growers produce over 40 species of mushrooms and think there is a market in Wisconsin.

Roy Diblick, co owner of Northwind Farm, and Ms. Zhao discussed the possibility of his traveling to China to look for new perennial varieties.

So what are they really looking for and where does this mean to Wisconsin greenhouses? Unless you are a mushroom grower I don't think there will be an immediate return but there may be future contacts.

Editor

## Container Gardening

Container gardening has been booming for 15 or 20 years. When I worked at Bach Floral a Des Moines, Iowa greenhouse 36 years ago we grew only a few 8 and 10" Fuchsia and Ivy Geranium baskets and no other planters or containers for outdoor sales. Last April I visited Bach Floral, now named Central Iowa Greenhouse, for the first time since 1973. It was hard to tell if the roof had been changed from the single layer glass it had been in 1973. The view was obscured by containers, both hanging baskets and mixed pots. I don't know how the crops on the benches grew; they were receiving almost no direct sunlight. Container gardening has mushroomed since 1973. It has grown the same way in Wisconsin's greenhouses.

Why are greenhouses growing plants this way? Because the consumer loves containers and it brings more profit to a business.

According to the Container Gardening Associated, consumers spend \$1.3 billion on containers each year. On a visit to a former customer in early June, 2008 I was told by the owner that his hanging basket sales were way ahead of last year. I'm not sure how his season

turned out in the end but it is a sign of continued consumer demand.

Why does the consumer like containers? First, they are practical for all consumer age groups. They work on the “baby boomer’s” condo balconies. They are easy to maintain when the owner has a bad back or knees. They are easier for the Gen X and Gen Ys who are busy running their children to soccer games, ballet practice, etc. and don’t have time to plant and maintain plants in an in ground garden. Containers are also a good way for young children to garden plus they solve in garden soil problems, are mobile, can make the contents more visible and even allow customers to grow vegetables on their decks, porches and even roof tops.

What does this mean to you a greenhouse/garden center and how can you capitalize on this demand and maximize your profits in the continuing trend? To do this you need to do the following:

1) Present different containers each time your customer enters the business. Show them a new, exciting look! For ideas read supplier’s catalogs and consumer magazines. Ask your plant and seed suppliers about new ideas, combinations and trends. Remember they see lots of businesses as they travel. Talk to your customers asking what they are looking for and what excites them. Also, it is important to attend meetings where new ideas are presented and exchanged (i.e.: at CFGW membership meetings). Visit your neighboring greenhouse and even flower shop for ideas. Keep your business and ideas exciting and visionary.

2) Make the container easy to grow. If the buyer is successful he will buy again. If they fail they are likely to quit and not

try again or even blame your business for their failure.

3) Use new and different containers. Everyone has plastic baskets and is growing moss and coconut lined containers. Continue to grow these but try something new unusual containers such as old shoes, and bicycles with baskets, kitchen containers, and topiaries. Let your imagination go wild. Offer something different and off the wall. You probably won’t need many of these but they add excitement.

Remember keep it exciting, new and fresh. Surprise your customer. Give them something to come back for.

Editor

## 2008 Verbena Trials

Results of the CFGW and U. W.s West Madison Agriculture Research Stations Verbena trials are available. The outdoor trial contained 100 varieties of vegetative and seed propagated Verbena (probably the largest such trial in the U.S.) at the research station on Mineral Point Road in Madison. The trial was supported by the CFGW though a USDA grant administered by DATCP. The plants and seed were donated by Ball Flora Plant, Cohen, Selecta First Class, Florida Plant Specialists, Proven Winners and Ball Seed. The trial gardens are open every day during the summer and a Field Day was held on August 9, 2008 offering an opportunity for greenhouse/garden centers growers and staff to view the trials to select the best varieties for Wisconsin conditions. A website is being developed to make the results easily available on line but it is not complete but you can find them by going to: “<http://www.ars.wisc.edu>” click on “West Madison” in the lower left of the window then click on “2008

Commercial Flower Growers of Wisconsin” and “Verbena Evaluations 7/7/08” and “Verbena Evaluations 8/27/08” will come up on the screen. Click on one of these to view the results for that date. The best varieties will be different depending on the date they were rated. At the bottom of the spread sheet will be a line which lists the 6 suppliers. Click on that and you will bring up that supplier’s ratings by variety. Contact John Esser if you want printed copies.

Editor

## CFGW Receives USDA Grant

The CFGW received a \$14,044 grant from the USDA’s 2008 budget, administered by DATCP, to continue the cut flower and bedding plant field trials at the West Madison Research Station as well as continued development of the website to provide access to the data from those trials.

The 2009 trials will include annual and perennial field grown cut flowers as well as vegetatively propagated Lobelia, Lantana and yellow Calibrachoa. Board member Bruce Sadowski in conjunction with the West Madison Research Station selected these species for this year’s trials.

This year’s field trials will be held on August 6, 2009. Mark that date on your calendar!

Editor

## What will Spring Bring?

Many owners and growers are worried about spring and what business will be. I don’t have a crystal ball but can say

that over the 36 years I’ve worked in the greenhouse industry I’ve found that our business is better during recession. I believe people who do not have the money to travel and will stay home and work in their gardens. Will that apply to spring, 2009?

I received an email from Proven Winners who passed on some statistics concerning interest in their “Gardener’s Idea Book” (a brochure featuring PW plants) and the “Winners Circle” (an e-newsletter). From January 1 to 19, 2008 they received 151 requests for the Idea Book and 581 Winners Circle sign up. For the same period in 2009 they’ve sent out 957 Ideas books and received 2,271 requests for the Winners Circle email. Does this data indicate increased consumer interest in the spring season?

Often in a year with a long, snowy, cold winter Wisconsin consumers want to be outside and in their gardens to plant. Does this apply to spring, 2009?

My answer to all of these questions is I’m not sure but our business is probably more controlled by the weather than the economy. Pray for good spring weather!

Editor

## Calendar of Events

February 19, 2009 **CFGW Membership meeting** at Carlin Sales, 7:00 PM. For more information contact any board member or John Esser by phone or at [info@cfgw.org](mailto:info@cfgw.org). **Member or not all are welcome.**

March 26, 2009 **CFGW Membership meeting** at Waukesha Floral, 7:00 PM. For information contact a board member or John Esser by phone or at [info@cfgw.org](mailto:info@cfgw.org). **Member or not all are welcome.**

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