

Flower Growers' Perspective

By **JOB ROSKAM**

As a PCA Board member representing the Floriculture sector, I am very satisfied with the response from Australian and New Zealand growers who attended the PCA conference and dedicated flower program.

Tuesday started with an early morning Melbourne Flower Market tour organised by Rennae Christensen from Flowers Victoria. Many were surprised and vocal at the large volume of imports, on the Melbourne Market floor.

Paul Horn, Rob Schwartz and Rob McGahy, Director of Plant Products, Plant Division, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), Herman Eijkelboom and Wim van der Ende each gave flower growers an opportunity to update their growing knowledge.

In particular, the quarantine session raised interesting questions about biosecurity and our susceptibility to pests and diseases through imports.

On Wednesday, Ball Australia generously sponsored the flower farm bus tour.

First stop was at TNB Tulips where Els and Nick Bakker answered questions and explained their growing methods to the conference delegates. All the growers were impressed with the level of automation including rolling benches, sorting and bunching machines. The investment in the Bercomex Furora equipment was worth every dollar, increasing quality and reducing labour costs in processing.

The next farm visit was to the new glasshouse at Sunny Hill Flowers where Rob de Wit showed how he grows lilies in crates. The soil is steamed, re-used and filled into crates automatically with Potveer machinery. The bulbs are planted by hand and then the crates are moved on pallets into the greenhouse. Then a 'mobile stacker' picks up stacks of crates from the pallet and rolls them out into the bay. Many delegates commented on how uniform and healthy the Liliium crop was looking.

The next stop was to see Delphinium, Kale and Stock grower Joe Raudino. Joe is an excellent example of someone who grows quality products in a plastic greenhouse, without the latest technology. On low profit margin crops like his, Joe makes the very best of what he has.

After lunch we went to The Big Bouquet where Bert Rijk grows gerberas in a 1.2 hectare glasshouse. Bert explained the operation of his farm and answered many questions from the attending gerbera growers. One of the interesting topics discussed was about controlling insects with Integrated Pest Management (IPM). The availability of beneficiary insects and restrictions on the use of chemicals were debated.

Very special thanks go to the property owners on the Ball Australia and PCA Conference Flower Farm Tour, who opened up their farms for other growers.

First time flowers growers attending the conference were also impressed by the extent of the trade exhibition. Fifty national and international companies displayed their latest products and research. Also the high quality of the technical speaker program inspired everyone.

During long meal breaks between lectures, growers discussed what they saw and learnt about during the day. It was an excellent network opportunity and further socialising in the evening saw new friendships made and solidified.

This was the first time the PCA conference had a dedicated floriculture day. And with its success, I feel that many more such opportunities to share, network and learn together, will be good for all.

So mark your calendars for the 13th biennial PCA Conference in July 2015 at Jupiter's Casino on Queensland's Gold Coast, and join other flower growers who learn from the best.

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Flower growers Ron Boon, Greg Neil, Sander Kerst with Mitchell Donnan (PCA PCO / Growool)



Lis Blandamer & Rene Christensen (Flowers Victoria / VFF)



Bill Biemond & son with Job Roskam (PCA/Brinkman/Roskam Young Plants)

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