Reviews

The 2017 National Floriculture Forum: Engaging Young People in the Industry

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The National Floriculture Forum (NFF) is an annual meeting that brings together floriculture focused industry members from greenhouse growers and industry leaders and experts, to university faculty and graduate students, along with government scientists from various institutions and agencies. Attendance varies from year to year, averaging 45–50 attendees. The forum was first convened in 1999, meeting annually, (with the exception of 2010 and 2012) at important industry-related locations around the United States. The NFF has even gone international with meetings in the Netherlands, Germany, and one

in Canada (Table 1). The meetings are generally advertised through emails, social media, professional meetings, and word of mouth. Funding for the annual meeting has been accomplished by a combination of financial support by the American Floral Endowment (AFE) and registration fees. Additional historical notes and summaries for many of these forums are discussed in further detail on the AFE website which hosts the NFF website (AFE, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c).

The intent of the forum is to bring together folks from the diverse floriculture field with objectives of addressing important and timely industry issues and concerns; develop and enhance collaborative relationships; and to improve communication and dissemination of information within the American floriculture industry (AFE, 2017b; Bridgen, 1999a, 1999b). The forum, on average, convenes for about 2–3 d, in which 1 d is usually devoted to field trips to learn about local floriculture/horticulture facilities, such as production and retail greenhouses, gardens, and research centers. The remaining time is devoted to presentations and discussion by the attendees and guest speakers, based on current research and the conference theme.

The objective of this article is to provide an overview and insight into the NFF. This year, the NFF was held in Philadelphia, PA. The overarching theme for this year's event was centered on attracting and engaging young people in the industry. There were 32 attendees, representing nine universities [Cornell University (Ithaca, NY), Kansas State University (Manhattan), Michigan State University (East Lansing), North Carolina State University (Raleigh), University of Georgia (Athens), University of Hawaii at Manoa (Honolulu), University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Virginia Tech University (Blacksburg), and West Virginia University (Morgantown)], three horticulture companies [Ball Horticultural Co. (West Chicago, IL), J.R. Peters Inc. (Allentown, PA), and Bloom'n Gardens Landscape, LLC (Atlanta, GA)] and two professional organizations [AFE (Alexandria, VA) and International Plant Propagators' Society-Eastern Region of North America (Southhold, NY)].

The first day of the forum was devoted to allowing forum attendees to partake in the world-renowned Philadelphia Flower Show, one of the country's premier horticulture events, hosted by the Pennsylvania Horticulture Society. This was the 188th Philadelphia Flower Show, in which this year's theme was "Holland: Flowering the World." The spectacular display showcased tens of thousands of bulbs including tulip (*Tulipa*), daffodil (*Narcissus*), hyacinth (*Hyacinthus*), and many more, interspersed with windmills and bicycles, along with over 6000 cut flowers hanging from the ceiling. The day wrapped up with a networking dinner and provided a chance for the attendees to introduce themselves.

The second day of the NFF was devoted to local industry and attractions. The group's first stop was Flowers by Bauers (Jarrettsville, MD), a hydroponic cut flower facility that specializes in high-quality cut flowers for local, direct sales. The group learned about the different cultural considerations for the species they grow, including snapdragon (*Antirrhinum majus*), sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*), dianthus (*Dianthus barbatus*), lisianthus (*Eustoma* hybrids), and rose (*Rosa* hybrids). The group's next stop was at the world-famous Longwood Gardens

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Table 1. The National Floriculture Forum themes, locations, and coordinators since its inception in 1999.

Yr	Theme ²	Location	Coordinator
Mar. 2017	Engaging young people in the industry	Philadelphia, PA	Krystal Snyder
Jan. 2016	International horticulture and IPM	The Netherlands and Germany	Mark Bridgen
Mar. 2015	Marketing of plants in floriculture	Minneapolis, MN	Terry Ferriss
May 2014	Sphagnum peat industry in action	Winnipeg, MB, Canada	Chris Currey, Brian Krug, and Mike Evans
Mar. 2013	Creative thinking, creative funding: research, extension, and teaching programs and consortiums	Portsmouth, NH	Stephanie Burnett, Brian Krug, Roberto Lopez, and Neil Mattson
Spring 2012	Did not convene		
Mar. 2011	Partnerships, alliances, brands, and initiatives	Dallas, TX	Charles Hall
Spring 2010	Did not convene		
Mar. 2009	Sustainability in the real world	Miami and Apopka, FL	Paul Fisher
Feb. 2008	Reaching out	Raleigh, NC	Brian Whipker
Jan. 2007	International floriculture and IPM	The Netherlands and Germany	Mark Bridgen
Feb. 2006	Survival strategies for floriculture programs	Grand Rapids, MI	Erik Runkle
Feb. 2005	A return to key issues facing floriculture professionals	Chicago, IL	Paul Thomas
Feb. 2004	Making the connection between industry and the public: What is the message we are sending?	Miami, FL	Rick Schoellhorn
Feb. 2003	Partnerships in floriculture: USDA, industry, university and botanic gardens	Columbus, OH	David Tay
Apr. 2002	California pack trials	San Diego to San Francisco, CA	Heiner Lieth
Feb. 2001	Horticulture landmark award to agricultural research service	College Park, MD	Terry Ferriss
Feb. 2000	Future of floriculture in the USA	Chicago, IL	Mark Bridgen
Feb. 1999	Improving communication and cooperation in the floriculture community	Chicago, IL	Mark Bridgen

²IPM = International Plant Messe (Essen, Germany); USDA = U.S. Department of Agriculture.

(Kennett Square, PA). Over lunch, the group learned about the different educational programs and initiatives at Longwood. And afterward, the attendees were provided tours of research and plant production facilities and conservatory. After Longwood Gardens, the next stop was at Terrain (Glen Mills, PA), a high-end garden center. The attendees provided tours to explore the unique upscale garden center's plant offerings, café, and the lifestyle merchandising for which it is known.

The third and final day of the forum provided an opportunity for research updates by graduate students from several institutions, a guest speaker, and general discussion. The presentations started with the group learning about current research from several Ph.D. graduate students. Mara Grossman (Virginia Tech) shared her research findings on different plant growth regulators and photoperiod effects on controlling overall plant height on several cultivars of coneflower (*Echinacea*) hybrids. Kellie Walters (Michigan State

University) discussed her ongoing research related to ethephon, specifically, determining efficacy based on the influence of carrier water alkalinity and ambient air temperature at application. A fellow graduate student, Qingwu (William) Meng (Michigan State University) shared with the group how different light emitting diode light spectra affected flowering time and morphology of a variety of photoperiodic floriculture crops (Meng and Runkle, 2016). The group learned about a new potential cut flower and cut foliage species from Leynar Leyton Naranjo (University of Georgia). He provided a promising preliminary overview of his master's research project on glossy abelia (*Abelia × grandiflora*) and its vase life. Joshua Henry (North Carolina State University) discussed part of his master's research that included detailed characterization of phosphorus deficiency in chrysanthemum (*Chrysanthemum morifolium*) and ornamental pepper (*Capsicum annuum*) during the reproductive stage (Henry, 2017).

After the student research reports, Dr. Teresita Amore (University

of Hawaii at Manoa) shared insight on two programs she was engaged in for promoting floriculture. The first was the AgDiscovery Program, a summer outreach program sponsored by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, targeting high school students. The second program described internal survey courses in the department to attract enrolled college students to horticulture. Dr. Mark Bridgen (Cornell University), who has been significantly involved and instrumental in organizing NFF from its inception, provided a brief overview of the history of the NFF.

The guest speaker was Lloyd Traven, owner of Peace Tree Farm (Kintnersville, PA). Lloyd shared his experience and insight related to forcing plants for the Philadelphia Flower Show, which they have done for 9 years. To cap off the NFF meeting, representatives from AFE shared updates of activities at the AFE. Debi Chedester, AFE Executive Director, provided an overview of recent recruitment endeavors, including new videos for scholarships and internships for

students and funding opportunities available through the AFE. Lori Ostrow, AFE Communications Director, shared updates and information about the Young Professionals Council (YPC). A primary focus of the NFF this year was to engage younger floriculture members, namely, graduate students and young industry professionals. Several members of the YPC were in attendance. During the 3-d event, the young individuals met separately to discuss and outline strategies for attracting more young people to the industry. A key part of the YPC is for the younger generation to interact and collaborate with influential industry leaders and experienced members of the academic community. By inviting YPC members to NFF they were able to do that. More information about the YPC is available on the AFE website (AFE, 2017d).

The final item of business was discussion about future NFF events. The next two NFF events have been tentatively set. In 2018, Elizabeth Felter (University of Florida) volunteered to develop and coordinate the forum. The 2018 NFF is planning on meeting 1–4 Mar. 2018 in central Florida. This meeting will take advantage of central Florida's rich horticulture industry. Currently, the tentative visits include three growing operations [Roseville Farms (Apopka, FL), Live Trends Design (Apopka, FL), and Knox Nursery (Winter Garden, FL)], a visit to Winter Park, an America in Bloom award-winning city, Leu Gardens (Orlando, FL), and an optional visit to the Epcot International Flower and Garden Festival (Orlando, FL). A business meeting and presentations are also planned.

For 2019, Paul Thomas (University of Georgia) has agreed to develop the NFF program. The theme will focus on cut flowers and marketing strategies in Southern California,

with a focus on close interaction with the California Cut Flower Commission. Tentatively, the dates for the 2019 NFF will be around the time of the California Spring Trials, for attendees to take advantage of the opportunity to attend this event. Control the AFE website (AFE, 2017c) for the most up-to-date information regarding NFF events.

The 2017 NFF was a successful meeting. There were several great industry facilities visited, along with the opportunity to experience a great horticulture exhibition. Moreover, attendees learned about current and new insights regarding producing floriculture crops from several graduate students. In fact, about 30% of the attendees were graduate students, which was exciting, as they are part of the next generation to lead the industry. Thanks to the generosity of the AFE, several graduate students received travel grants to assist with their attendance. Graduate students and faculty advisors should consider these grants for future NFF meetings. This information can be found at the NFF website (AFE, 2017c).

As with all NFF meetings, there were great opportunities for faculty, students and industry members to connect, reconnect, and develop professional relationships, along with developing future collaborative opportunities at this year's meeting. However, there are still needs to further identify critical research opportunities and requirements, develop partnerships, and promote floriculture as a viable, important, and critical part of the horticulture industry (Paparozzi et al., 2013). These needs are just as important and concerning as they were when the NFF was formally developed back in 1999. More information can be found for NFF on the website (AFE,

2017a, 2017b, 2017c) or their Facebook (Menlo Park, CA) page.

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