2012 Tagawa Greenhouse Enterprises Internship Experience
By: Ramanda Maves

It was an absolutely great experience being an intern for Tagawa Greenhouse Enterprises. While there I gained so much insight about the horticulture industry and my own personal growth. This internship also gave me the opportunity to learn both the grower ready wholesale and finished retail ready plant product. It also, gave me the opportunity to do some research and give a presentation on decreasing the company’s waste to supervisors of the company. Completing this internship has definitely impacted my future plans in the industry.

One of the first things I did when starting my internship at Tagawa’s was learning about the soil, seeding, and movement aspects involved with plug production. It’s the nitty-gritty side of things, but I have an appreciation for it and have a better understanding in how it plays a vital role in plug production. For example, if the seeds aren’t stored properly germination rates may decrease and as the seedlings in the trays grow out in the greenhouse more patching will be needed prior to shipping and that effects labor hours. So, having a good start in the beginning process will carry on down the line to make a better quality product.

After getting a taste of plug production and working hours, I was then moved into the greenhouse to really gained experience in growing plugs. For 6 weeks I learned how moisture, light, and air affected the growing habits of a vinca crop. Vinca plugs were what I was primarily working with, but I did also learn some growing techniques for begonia and impatiens. At first it only seemed like I was just watching seedlings grow as I was watering or fertilizing the trays. However, as the weeks went on I started to see my own working habits come into place like making a list of to-do items for the day and what might need to get done throughout the week. This challenged me to become more efficient and really take care of what needed to get done.

Then after 6 weeks I traveled to Tagawa’s New Mexico facility to work for 2 weeks. While down there I had several work duties, but the main one was helping count plant inventory for the company. Other duties I did were watering plants for a couple days, and transplanting plugs into larger containers to be grown more and shipped. One of the things I enjoyed most was working in a Dutch glass greenhouse. In my opinion Dutch greenhouses are like the Cadillac of greenhouses and it was a great experience to work in one. Furthermore, I started to realize how I was more interested in the planning that happens in operations on the production side than just growing plants. Finding this out has helped me narrow possible career choices which is good because I don’t want to just work, I want to work in something I really enjoy doing.

Coming back to Colorado, I switched gears and got a small taste of inventory, maintenance, distribution, marketing, and plug processing. These are all different departments within the company, but all are networked together. Inventory plays a huge role in the company, and the key point I learned while in this department was keeping a paper trail is essential to not lose information. Distribution was a really neat place to work in. Here, a lot of planning is involved to both receive product from other facilities and ship product out to customers. My main duty while in this department was arranging racks of product in lanes to be later loaded onto the correct truck.

After that I was moved back into the greenhouse to start retail ready production. Here I spent 6 weeks gaining experience in growing annual bedding plants to be sold in box stores and garden centers. Most of it I spent watering, fertilizing, spraying plant growth regulators, and spacing plants among benches. Over this period I came to learn that anyone can grow a plant, but to grow plants uniformly is an art. I definitely enjoyed this part of my internship because I saw the plants come into bloom as they were ready to be shipped. Also, I was working in one of the older greenhouses that did not have very much automation and by being in this atmosphere will most definitely help in the future. The reason is, it is always great to have newer technology, but sometimes that technology has a glitch and knowing how to manually adjust vents and fans is a great skill to have.

At the end of May and for the rest of June I moved around quite a bit before the end of my internship. One week was spent in Retail Ready Marketing and here it is much more customer confrontation than dealing with plants. It was a great experience, but I learned I much prefer working with plants and making them look great than answering customer questions of where a plant should be placed in their yard. A lot of patience is
involved is this department, and I have great respect for Tagawa’s employees who do this all the time. They do such an excellent job at promoting product and making customers happy.

Another week was spent at the sister company, Tagawa Garden Center, and this was an awesome place to be. Here the department supervisors spent an hour or two describing what it was their job entailed and answered questions. Why I say this is an awesome place is because of the atmosphere the garden center projects. It’s more community oriented by offering classes and just walking in the door put a smile on my face. Yes, it did sell plants, fertilizer, and gardening tools like any other garden center, but it was how customer service was addressed that made the place so inviting. What I took away most from being here was ideas of not reinventing garden centers but adjusting garden centers to keep customers interested in gardening and coming back.

Finally the rest of June was spent primarily in the office area getting to know the business side of the operation. One morning I was learning parts of insurance and that afternoon was spent with a supervisor talking about finance. This part did interest me because my mind was finally putting the pieces together of why certain things are done within the company. At the beginning, in January, I was told put these trays here and now I was learning the reason why those trays were put there. Also, was given the great opportunity to talk and ask questions to the CEO of the company. Before the internship I never would have thought I would be given the chance to speak with the CEO, but this is one of the reasons why Tagawa’s has such a great intern program. The people working here want you to succeed. They engage you to learn and learn as much as you can. The last week of my internship was primarily spent finishing up my project I had been working on the last 6 months to present to the company. This was a good experience to be placed in a business setting. It wasn’t extremely formal, but did place me in a professional mind set. And after 6 months of working on it I did want to present my findings.

Overall, I can’t express how much I appreciate the opportunity to be an intern at Tagawa’s. Everyone I worked with was happy to give their knowledge of what they know about the horticulture industry and what they did for the company and also answer my many questions. It’s interesting to see that even though Tagawa Greenhouse Enterprises is such a large company they still have that family oriented feeling about them.

Now, I am looking forward to take back all the knowledge I have gained about the industry and apply it during my last year of college. It is one thing to learn how to do it from books, but another to apply it in an actual setting. From this experience I have learned there is so much more opportunities in horticulture than growing plants and selling plants. So many job opportunities I didn’t know existed until now. I am still geared more to choosing something along the production side because I do love being around plants, but I feel more interested in choosing a career that involves planning what is grown or how it is placed and movement of the plant within the greenhouse. Also, I am now more interested in garden centers and how knowing what a customer wants is valuable to what should be grown in the greenhouse. My future plans seem murky, and I’m not completely sure where I want to end up, but I am certain it will deal with greenhouses. I just love being in and around them.

And thank you so much for giving me the chance to not only work in a horticulture setting, but also helping me grow as an individual. Without a foundation such as this, students like myself may not have even thought about traveling to another place in the country and see the many potential opportunities there are in the field. I appreciate this so much and this internship is something I will never forget.
From left to right, weighing seed to be seeded later in the week, watering annual bedding plants in the greenhouse, and researching for special project by dumpster diving.

Taking soil sample to test pH and EC levels of crop and taking Lantana stock cuttings to be propagated.

Putting labels on trays to be later filled with soil and seeded. Placing seed packets back into their proper bins in the seed cooler room.
Pulling racks of Chrysanthemums that will be later put down on the greenhouse benches.

Enjoying my free time site-seeing some of Colorado’s amazing places by going to the Botanic Gardens in Denver and Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs.