

This past summer I had an excellent internship experience working with Ball Horticultural Company in West Chicago, Illinois. My three months were spent working with a large number of ornamental plant varieties for landscape installation, mixed containers and other marketing displays. Alongside production of each variety, I assisted in the Gardens at Ball landscaping in preparation for the annual Ball Seed Field Day where hundreds of producers and greenhouse marketers attend to view upcoming and new varieties! Key takeaways from my internship include the value of marketing greenhouse crops, collaboration between growers between and within a company, and crop timing.



Ball Horticultural Company was very open to exposing me to different areas of the horticulture industry. Within the first week of all the interns arriving, they hosted an intern social where we had the opportunity to meet interns, supervisors, past interns who were hired, and other staff. Looking back on this event, I would confirm it to be an important connection meeting because I learned about different jobs throughout the company from greenhouse workers and research specialists to head marketers and product line developers. Later in my internship, I reached out to staff I met at the intern social to work out a visit to the Elburn facility, the research greenhouses, and shadowed a grower while she maintained petunias. Even though this visit included much deadheading, pruning and flat moving, I appreciated the conversations I had with Sarah about current projects in Elburn, her years working for Ball and upcoming projects for Ball.

I would support Ball community for being a great working environment for interns for several reasons. First, they provide great housing at an affordable cost with the other interns, so you have an easy opportunity to make friends and not travel too far to work. Second, several employees, even those who did not work in the greenhouse or Gardens, offered insight and help when asked. Since the only desk/work area available for the two Garden interns was located in Customer Service, we heard a very different side of the company and I unexpectedly learned just how important customer relations is to Ball.



Lastly, Ball wants to invest in their interns and this made me feel like I was doing meaningful work in the greenhouse and Gardens. Much of my time was devoted to moving plant materials in the greenhouse, watering, planting and transplanting, our group of workers did not always have prolonged interaction with others. Hearing from supervisors, staff walking through the gardens, and even Anna Ball herself, saying how much progress and how beautiful the Gardens were looking made a huge impact on our days.

My two supervisors taught me well during my internship; Rachel helped me understand production scheduling, plant marketing choices and overall production of plants grown for the Gardens, while Sam taught me tactical landscape planning and maintenance for the Ball Seed Field Day towards the end of my internship. With them I spent the summer handling over

130,000 units of plants just for the landscape plots and learning growing habits/methods for each, many plants I knew from previous exposure but I never had the opportunity to work with this large number.

Several parts of my internship taught me the importance of production with marketing in mind. Since the Ball Seed Field Day was the highlight of the Gardens at Ball, it made sense to me that the work I was doing was to keep the plants the company is trying to market for 2018 looking their best. For a good portion of the crops, we did not have any problems, but a handful were difficult to meet our standards. Within the Ball Seed greenhouses, where Rachel planned most of her



production, our biggest problem was begonias rooting efficiently. Our standard size for the gardens were 18-01 and in order for the begonias to root fully, they had to remain on the benches which caused a few problems with space during the production period. Alongside the Ball Seed greenhouses, Rachel needed to showcase Ball FloraPlant material in the Gardens. While these plants were not grown in Ball Seed greenhouses, Rachel had to work as best as she could with the company. I found out, Ball FloraPlant had a large flow of materials to transplant in their greenhouses, which impacted the scheduled timeline of the plants Rachel requested, resulting in us getting plants that should have been grown on for another 2 weeks! Even though this was a learning opportunity for me, it still made it difficult to plant weak-rooted plugs like verbena and scaevola where the 18-01s would fall apart in our hands.

One of the best learning experiences over the summer was towards the end when Rachel sat down with me to explain a ‘crash-course’ on plant scheduling, ordering and production

managing. She was able to use examples from the summer to prove and disprove some of her scheduling choices, like the poinsettias and mums or the begonias and verbena. I remember her showing me an extensive spreadsheet with dates down to a T, but then laughing and told me to remember that “plants can’t read” so they ultimately determine readiness.

I am leaving Ball with an experience I will not forget and have explored deeper into my horticulture interests. I loved having the ability to work hands-on with the plants from an unexpected perspective where we market specifically to greenhouses with the end consumer in mind. This has given me a curiosity to



work closer with consumer marketing as well as production troubleshooting in the greenhouses. I already have plans on incorporating some of the production methods to our small scale horticulture club back at Cornell! From this internship through American Floral Endowment, I was able to have real and impactful work in a greenhouse otherwise unavailable to me in school.