

November 14, 2011

The American Floral Endowment
Attn. Debi Aker
1601 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

To Debi Aker and the Vic and Margaret Ball Internship Committee:

Hello, my name is Charlotte Vetter. I was gratefully selected to complete a six-month internship through the Vic and Margaret Ball internship scholarship program. Below is a light background of the company I interned for, a description of my internship duties, and then an evaluation of my experiences.

These past six-months I was an intern for Syngenta. Syngenta owns multiple companies, both in horticulture and agriculture, and was formed in 2000 by the merging of two European companies. Only in the past few years has Syngenta acquired horticulture businesses. In 2006, Syngenta purchased Conrad Fafard, Inc. and in 2008 acquired Goldsmith Seeds (*Company History*, 2011). I worked under the Conrad Fafard, Inc., a company that sells packaged growing media to greenhouse growers, as a Fafard Research Leader or FRL. Conrad Fafard, Inc. is headquartered in Agawam, Massachusetts but I mainly corresponded with the employees located in Anderson, South Carolina. I was based out of the Syngenta/Goldsmith Seeds location in Gilroy, CA. Goldsmith Seeds is a flower seed producer. They breed, produce and sell a wide variety of pot and bedding plants.

The FRL program was recently created in 2008 to:

“Bring together academic and practical research in an effort to help growers achieve healthier and more profitable plants. The program tests advanced potting-media formulations and analyzes how different raw materials, soil amendments and additives perform in varying greenhouse settings. By combining institutional knowledge with hands-on research, the program continues to gather information to develop new products and improve our current mixes.” (*Fafard: The Science Behind the Art*, 2011).

An FRL either completes a six-month or a year-long internship performing growing media trials in different greenhouses in the location the FRL is based out of. There are FRL's stationed all across the country conducting trials. In January, the FRL's travel to Anderson to be trained on how to professionally interact with greenhouse growers, how to set up growing media trials, and how to collect data for the trials they would be in charge of conducting. As I was taking over for the FRL in Gilroy at the end of May, the FRL previously stationed there trained me when I arrived in California.

The duties of my internship required the evaluation of "different raw materials used to manufacture soilless substrates ... [and the evaluation of] different "value-added" substrate amendments including controlled release fertilizers, water-absorbing polymers and biological agents." (*The Fafard Research Leader Program-Fafard Research and Development*, 2010).

Before beginning a trial, I traveled to the greenhouse with the grower account manager, Craig Nomura, who introduced me to the grower. The grower gave us a tour of the facilities and we discussed what type of trials he or she was interested in. Once the type of trial was agreed upon, I notified my supervisor, Dr. Rippey, who decided what type of growing medias would fit the trial and developed a protocol. She would send me the media, containers and plant material, if I wasn't going to use the grower's containers or plant material. Sometimes not enough media would be sent. Then, I would have to make adjustments to the protocol to try to get an appropriate amount of replications to still be able to observe differences in plant growth within the treatments.

Once the materials arrived, I would sow seeds, stick cuttings, or transplant seedlings and randomize the containers to ensure that all treatments would be treated equally and to eliminate the possible destruction of one treatment from the trial. I would also place a weather station, called a Watchdog, at the location of my trial in the greenhouse. This instrument recorded the high and low temperatures of the day, the relative humidity, temperature every fifteen minutes, and various other data.

In addition, I gave the grower a Plant Culture Sheet that informed the grower of the soils being trialed, the plant species, the container size, the projected trial end date, and fertilizer needs. It also told the grower to record the amount and date chemicals were applied to the trial plants.

To document the trials, I was required to collect growth data. This included measuring the height and diameter. In addition, I rated the root performance and plant quality of each plant. I gathered photos of the plants to provide a visual comparison of the soil treatments. I also collected the pH and EC values. Some trials required the calculation of the germination percentage, too.

Throughout the trial, as time allowed, I would enter the data I collected into a spreadsheet. At the completion of a trial, I would collect the Watchdog and download the information. I then sent all the photos, data, and Watchdog information to my supervisor. She organized the final data and I constructed a power point for each trial that contained the photos, graphs from the Watchdog, and graphs from the growth data I had collected. After I completed the power point, I sent it to my supervisor who presents it to the growers at the end of the year.

What I liked most about my internship was the numerous opportunities it provided me. I have been exposed to many more plants than I have ever been in my life. I found myself marveling almost every single day at a different plant, plant form, or landscape. I thoroughly enjoyed being in the company of so many different types of colors for one plant species, such as pansies.

I have had the opportunity to meet many people who know a lot about plants. From the plant breeders to those who water the plants, getting to know the people who work at Syngenta has been an excellent experience. I was given the opportunity to work with Spanish-speaking individuals and learn more of the language.

In addition, being located in Gilroy, California at Syngenta/Goldsmith Seeds has provided me with the ability to travel to places and see things that I wouldn't normally have traveled to otherwise, such as Yosemite National Park, the sights of San Francisco, and the Pacific Ocean.

Even though I did use some of the information I learned in the classroom, I felt that my internship should have used more of the information I learned. I also felt I didn't receive a very broad range of experiences through my internship, which would have given me a better understanding of the variety of jobs existing in horticulture.

This internship gave me more hands-on experience in the field of horticulture, which I am grateful for. I sometimes felt I used more of my limbs than of my brains. However, this is not a completely bad thing because a person must understand and learn how to do the dirty work in an operation to better appreciate the people who do it.

My eyes have really been opened to how big the horticulture business is. I immensely enjoyed the first visit to each different greenhouse because I was given a tour of the facilities. Being able to see how other greenhouses operate and what they grow has been most interesting.

Through this internship, I have discovered that I would definitely like to be employed in the horticulture field. Maybe not necessarily in the research of greenhouse media aspect of the field, but I do enjoy other areas of horticulture.

Thank you so much for the opportunity you gave me through the Vic and Margaret Ball Internship Scholarship program.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Vetter



Works Cited

Company History. Syngenta. 2011. Web. 22 Aug. 2011.

Fafard: The Science Behind the Art. Conrad Fafard, Inc., 2011. Web. 22 Aug. 2011.

The Fafard Research Leader Program-Fafard Research and Development. Conrad Fafard, Inc., 2010.

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