2016 National Floriculture Forum
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BACKGROUND

The National Floriculture Forum (NFF) is an annual educational meeting for greenhouse growers, industry leaders, university faculty, graduate students and government scientists from academic institutions, governmental agencies and the greenhouse industry. This group of floriculturists have been meeting since 1999. This meeting brings together diverse floricultural communities with the objectives to 1) address issues of importance to the floriculture industry, 2) form collaborative relationships, and 3) improve communication within the American floriculture industry and disseminate information. This meeting is the only one of its kind and continues to bring more members of the floriculture community together each year. The importance of the NFF has increased as the number of horticulture departments and funding for floriculture has decreased.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The 2016 National Floriculture Forum (NFF) went to the Netherlands and to the International Trade Fair for Plants (IPM) in Essen, Germany from January 24-29, 2016. The theme for the 2016 NFF program was “International Floriculture”; the venue was totally different from recent years. This horticultural trip was an intense 5 days, plus 2 days of travel. The NFF spent the first 3 days in the Netherlands visiting greenhouse operations, the flower auction, and other horticultural sites. After 3 days in the Netherlands, the group traveled down to Essen, Germany to spend two days at the International Trade Fair for Plants (IPM). The IPM is a unique combination of exhibition areas, plant displays, innovative technology, and trendy floristry that offers a comprehensive overview of the green industry and floristry. With 1,600 exhibitors from 49 countries and 62,000 trade visitors every year from all over the world, the IPM Essen is the world's largest event of its kind. Participants returned to the USA after an intense and educational 5 days.

The NFF group began its touring of the Netherlands on January 24. Tours of greenhouse operations and growers in the Netherlands continued on January 25 and 26. On the morning of January 27, a coach bus took all participants down to Essen, Germany, about a 2 ½ hour ride. Once in Essen, everyone was on their own for the remainder of January 27 and all of January 28 to visit the IPM Trade Show. On the morning of January 29, participants loaded onto the bus, and traveled back to Amsterdam for the return flight to the USA that evening.
RESULTS

The members of the 2016 NFF were scheduled to fly out of JFK Airport in New York City on Saturday, January 23. However, a very severe snow storm was moving to the east coast and flights were cancelled on Wednesday, January 20. This allowed the NFF to rebook the flights for free, and the group departed on Friday, January 22, ahead of the storm, and arrived in Amsterdam on Saturday morning. All 45 people who had registered for the trip were able to depart a day earlier. The early departure allowed participants to spend an extra day in Amsterdam and to tour the city on their own. Participants stayed at the Hotel NH Carlton Amsterdam on Saturday night.

On Sunday, January 23, everyone moved to Hotel Krasnapolsky, a five-star hotel on Dam Square in central Amsterdam. That evening, everyone enjoyed a Dutch meal together at the D’Vijff Vlieghen Restaurant. The restaurant is only a 9-minute walk from the hotel.

Monday, January 25

On Monday, January 25, the day’s activities were organized by Dr. Will Healy of Ball Horticulture. The theme of the day was: Research in Action, Creating the Floriculture Future. The day began with a visit to Florensis, an innovative, second-generation family business that has been providing professional growers with new varieties and plant propagation material since 1941. They are a young plant producer of vegetative annuals, pot plants, bedding plants, perennials and cut flowers. They supply growers with an unrivalled assortment of more than 4,000 different varieties. This automated young plant producer demonstrates the diversity of young plant production methods currently used in Europe. There, the group saw returnable trays, automated seeding and shipping lines coupled with automated fertilization and lighting equipment.

Lunch was at the WUR cafeteria, followed by a tour. Wageningen UR (WUR) is a collaboration between Wageningen University and the DLO foundation. The strength of Wageningen UR lies in its ability to join the forces of specialized research institutes and Wageningen University. It also lies in the combined efforts of the various fields of natural and social sciences. This union of expertise leads to scientific breakthroughs that can quickly be put into practice and be incorporated into education.

The final stop of the day was at the Beekenkamp Group, a family business that has joined the forces of 3 different expertise. It consists of Beekenkamp plants, vegetables & ornamentals,
Beekenkamp Verpakkingen (Packaging) and Deliflor Chrysanten (Chrysanthemums). Since its foundation in 1951, the group has developed into a company that employs 2,200 people worldwide and produces over 1.7 billion young plants per year. It has a total greenhouse area of almost 80 hectares. The company is market leader in elatior begonias, cyclamen, dahlia, platycodon, New Guinea impatiens and gerbera.

**Tuesday, January 26**

On Tuesday, January 26, the day’s activities were organized by Dr. William Miller of Cornell University. Theme: The Dutch Greenhouse and Floriculture Industries. The day began early with a 6 a.m. departure from the hotel for a guided tour of the Aalsmeer flower auction, the largest trading center for plants and flowers in the world. The Auction’s annual turnover is 4.6 billion euros. Its plant and flower sales include 12.6 billion items a year with 2,400 customers. After the auction, the group toured JAMI, a tomato operation with LED lights. A representative of Philips helped to lead the tour and gave an informational presentation to the group after the tour.

Then the NFF traveled to Floral Holland. Members toured the “Cash and Carry” operation in the Naaldwijk auction. Lunch was at their Pyramide Restaurant. Following lunch, the NFF toured Lilylooks Wetering Potlilium ([www.lilylooks.nl](http://www.lilylooks.nl)). This lily grower is located in Den Hoorn in the province South Holland in the Netherlands. They specialize in growing pot lilies in a state of the art 270,000 ft² greenhouse operation. Their greenhouses are fully automated to ensure quality, crop consistency and manage cost.

The final stop of the day was at Wesselsman hydroponic tulip flowers. There the group witnessed large-scale production of hydroponic tulips for cut flowers. Their grading and packaging systems were especially interesting.

**Wednesday, January 27, and Thursday, January 28**

On Wednesday, January 27, the NFF members departed the Amsterdam hotel very early and the bus drove down to Essen, Germany. The group arrived in late morning and checked into the Sheraton Essen Hotel.

For the remainder of the day, and the entire following day, Thursday, January 28, the participants were able to visit the international trade fair for plants (IPM). The IPM is the world’s leading trade fair for horticulture. It is the only specialist trade fair of its kind to cover the entire value chain of plants, including production, technology, floristry, garden features, and the point of sale.
No other plant fair offers trade visitors such a comprehensive market overview and so many multifaceted novelties. In 2015 they broke a record with more than 1,600 exhibitors from 50 nations present the newest botanic displays, innovative technology, and trendy floristry.

During the evening of January 27, the NFF was the guest of Dummen at their greenhouse operation in Rheinberg. In addition to a detailed guided tour of their facilities, they provided dinner for everyone.

Friday, January 29

On Friday, January 29, members of the NFF departed Germany and traveled to Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam and departed on KLM Airlines, and arrived in New York City later that evening.

CONCLUSIONS

The 2016 National Floriculture Forum gave participants an opportunity to observe international floriculture first hand! The tours of Dutch greenhouse operations and the ability to visit the largest trade show in the world at the IPM were educational experiences unlike any other. The trip led to useful discussions by the leaders of US floriculture about strategies to improve the image and prestige of floriculture in America.

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