

Launching a Career: Cultivate 2021 and the Impact of the American Floral Endowment

2020 Paul Thomas Floriculture Production Intern of the Year, Renata Goossen, shares her experience attending Cultivate 2021



In 2020, when I was designated the Paul Thomas Intern of the Year, it represented the culmination of many things to me—**hard work, passion, and industry pride**. I recently graduated with my Bachelor of Science in Horticulture Production from Kansas State University during COVID-19 – a time in history that challenged every aspect of every individual’s life. Hopefully, we all learned about the value of flexibility and innovation that will carry us into the future. Despite ongoing industry challenges, the [American Floral Endowment](#)’s support and flexibility during my college career are some of my most valued recollections. Several organizations shut down and halted student support, discouraging students battling to work through college. AFE continued onward, and I cannot express how much that means to students like me. AFE worked with students while the rest of the world felt like it was working against us.

As I conveyed, my [Vic and Margaret Ball internship](#) at [Green Circle Growers](#) was a pivotal experience in my life. It taught me numerous lessons about the practice of horticulture, the tailored careers possible in our industry, and about making meaningful connections with others who share my passion. Even now, I am still learning from my internship. The experience I gained is helping guide me through the launch of my career, and I built meaningful relationships with mentors and peers who are still present in my life. [Cultivate’21](#) further revealed the value I have gained from AFE and how fortunate I am to be a part of our industry.

Connected for Life

My trip to Cultivate cemented my place in the floriculture industry. While this was not my first time experiencing Cultivate, it was my first time attending post-graduation. Previously, I attended as an intern with a group of growers and virtually as an AmericanHort Scholar. It was strange to travel alone for the first time, and while uncomfortable at first, I found it bolstered my confidence in my new career and revealed the connections I intend to cultivate in the coming years. I was shocked to find that I was well-networked from my previous attendance and industry



experiences. I saw friends from Loma Vista Nursery, KSU, the AmericanHort Scholars program, my internship at Green Circle Growers, and co-workers from my current role there. Not only did I see many old friends, but I also made new connections that I know will benefit my journey down the road. I also enjoyed getting to know Sherman Hartman as part of my time at Cultivate. I was interested in hearing his perspectives and goals within the industry and drawing similarities between the benefits of our AFE-supported internships.

Renata's Garden

My career has developed in unexpected ways during the last year. Though the entrepreneurship bug has been circulating in my mind ever since beginning my horticulture journey in junior high, I have officially decided to pursue entrepreneurship this year. I formed Renata's Garden, LLC, and I am working toward a planned opening in Spring 2022. I believe our industry holds a special place for each person called to horticulture. Through my experience at Green Circle Growers, it became clear that I loved all facets of production horticulture, including business and marketing strategy. I felt the pull to create and build something of my own.

Because of my newfound purpose, I approached Cultivate from a new viewpoint. In the past, I focused all my attention on production-oriented education sessions. This year, I focused more on consumer marketing and business management. Although I completed business courses at K-State, I could not take business classes oriented toward horticulture. This year, I used my time at Cultivate to prepare and coach me through my future goals and decisions. I was encouraged by how receptive people were to a young entrepreneur, and I am excited to get to work!

My main take-aways from the trade show and education sessions related to my business goals are as follows:

- Check your water quality before building a production program.
- Build a cost analysis plan to cover overhead costs year-round.
- Challenges are around every corner, but there are industry members to help.
- It's essential to stay involved in the broader industry, no matter your position.

Green Circle Growers



My journey with Green Circle Growers has led to my first official industry position. After my Vic and Margaret Ball internship, I was hired as a remote marketing intern and gradually built a place in their marketing department. Because I first interned as a grower, I could see the needs of their marketing department. As I became more oriented in the industry, I noticed a strong need for horticultural marketing specialists amongst companies like Green Circle Growers that work directly with our end consumers. Commercial greenhouse companies become fragmented by departments (i.e., sales, marketing, growing, operations, etc.) because people are so specialized in their specific roles. I took two departments that should be working in tandem, and

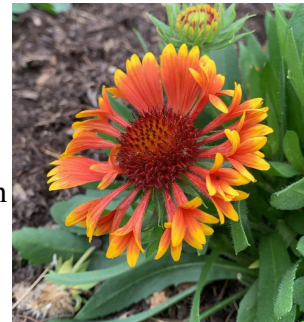
the consumer support specialist position was created. Now, I work to bridge the science of growing with the art of marketing. Cultivate helped me further my knowledge of consumer trends and psychology. I was also able to introduce our entire marketing department at Green Circle Growers to Cultivate. As they had never attended, I pointed out the value of seeing what other horticulture companies are doing and understanding how our industry works as a whole. Overall, I am excited to continue to develop my role at Green Circle Growers as I work remotely from Kansas.

My main take-aways from the trade show and education sessions related to my Green Circle marketing goals are as follows:

- Consumer education is more key than ever!
- Communicating the numerous benefits of our products will help our industry raise prices.
- Digital marketing and e-commerce are dominating forces in horticulture and will not return to pre-pandemic levels.
- The best consumer brands provide post-purchase plant care support to ensure consumer success.

Conclusion

I approached Cultivate from many angles this year and found tremendous value in my time spent. I built relationships, created new connections, and researched consumer horticulture to help drive our industry and start my own business. I am always eager to pay credit due because I was built by great mentors and organizations. American Floral Endowment will always hold a special place in my heart, and I cannot wait to be in the position to give back!



I loved touring the OSU trial gardens with a fellow K-State graduates and friend, Karen Schneck. This unique Gaillardia caught my eye.

Written by Renata Goossen, AFE's 2020 Paul Thomas Floriculture Production Intern of the Year. As part of this award, recipients report on their experience at Cultivate to inform AFE and the industry of its value and impact. AFE provides recipients with paid hotel and airfare to Cultivate conference, free registration to Cultivate from AmericanHort, a \$500 stipend, networking opportunities and photo op with AFE Representatives at Cultivate, and a feature article in AFE publications. To learn more about this award, click [here](#).