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AFE Vic & Margaret Ball Intern Scholarship

Final Report

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My time at Tagawa Greenhouse was an invaluable part of my education. During my six-month internship, not only was I able to apply all that I had learned from my degree program, but learned just as much, if not more, than I had in the classroom alone. Although my education had well-prepared me for a career in the horticulture industry, there truly is nothing like hands on experience in the field.

At first, I was hesitant to move halfway across the country for an internship, but I was surprised to by how much knowledge I gained from the location alone, Colorado having unique microclimates, multiple hardiness zones, and unique issues related to elevation that gave me a chance to learn about different natural ecosystems and sustainability practices.



The first four months of my internship was spent in production of young plants at the main facility in Brighton, Colorado, where I started in seeding and was able to witness the progression of the crops until they were shipped out. The majority of my time was spent under one of their head growers that oversaw germinating seedlings. From her, I learned much about the differing cultural needs of various annuals. Through both experience and detailed explanation of why we perform specific tasks, I was able to learn about irrigation, plant growth regulators, and environmental controls within a large-scale greenhouse.



In a range full of stock plants, I got hands-on experience identifying common greenhouse pests and diseases, applying biologicals, properly pruning herbaceous plants, and testing soil EC and pH. My classes had prepared me somewhat for these tasks, but I was grateful to be able to apply this knowledge in the field. Although I was unable to visit the facility where most cutting and sticking of plants occurred due to Covid-19 restrictions, I did get to spend time in the stock range and watch the cutting process on a much smaller scale and was able to care for the rooting plants.



My main task throughout the week was aiding in data collection for a patented research project. I found the problem-solving aspect enjoyable and appreciated the opportunity to learn



through trial and error, as well as develop more detail-oriented techniques for handling seedlings. It was exciting to see the results of my work from growing week to growing week and be able to document it. When it came to careers, I often thought about working in a research lab, but it was eye-opening to be able to experience this type of work at a production greenhouse. It made me realize there were many more opportunities to do the things I was interested in, outside of academia.

Tagawa Greenhouse is much more than a production facility, as they also merchandise their products at big box stores, as well as their own garden center. Being able to experience a many different aspects of the industry was one of the things that drew me to Tagawa. Not only was I able to work in production, but I was able to follow their plants from shipping and distribution right into stores, where I had the opportunity to interact with the public on the retail side of things, merchandise and set up displays of our plants, and learn from experienced master gardeners at Tagawa Gardens.

It was surprising how much I learned from my retail experience, having been a gardener myself for many years. I was able to see how the Tagawa name was synonymous with both quality and knowledge. Customers at retail chains knew that their plants came from Tagawa and would turn to the garden center for both more information and product. Every department at Tagawa Gardens had an expert in their area from whom I learned everything from how to prune a rose to how to help a customer find the right fertilizer for their needs and unique location.



Most years, Tagawa takes their interns to the ProGreen Expo, but due to Covid-19, the convention was online this year, but I was still given the time to attend the virtual panels and learn more about the green industry, the challenges of growing in Colorado, and new and developing greenhouse technology. I was able to watch lectures from CSU professors and see the type of research students were involved in at the university.



After I complete my associate degree in Horticulture, I had determined that I wanted to go on and continue my education at a state university and being able to see the work done at CSU added another school for me to consider if I decide to leave Iowa. Tagawa helped put me in contact with a professor at CSU who gave me a tour of their trial gardens and arboretum, as well as introduce me to their wonderful Horticulture program.

Interning at Tagawa Greenhouse was an amazing opportunity. It gave me a better sense of the type of work in horticulture I enjoy and showed me where I could apply my interests. There are more careers that I am now considering than I was prior to my internship, as well as more contacts to help me when I finally take my place in the industry or continue my education.

The six-month term was just long enough to see all sides of production and I wish I could have spent more time there, but I do have one more year to complete in my current educational program. My college was impressed with the internship program as well, and AFE allowed my instructor to visit and tour the facility. This fall, I will be talking to first-year students about my experiences at Tagawa and with AFE, encouraging more students to apply for the Vic & Margaret Ball Intern Scholarship. The distance was well worth the experience!

