

Kyle Beckman Internship Visit – Skagit Horticulture

I had the opportunity to visit Kyle Beckman, one of my undergraduate students majoring in Horticulture at Colorado State University (CSU), during his internship at Skagit Horticulture in Mount Vernon, WA on June 29th, 2023.



I arrived early that morning and met with both Kyle and Brigitte (Brie) Zettl, his internship supervisor, for a tour of the facilities. Brie is a Head Grower and has been working at Skagit Horticulture for a bit under a year. Brie took multiple hours out of her day to tour me around their greenhouse facilities, and it was great to see what Kyle had been working on so far during his internship. Production in the greenhouse was a bit slow as they were heading into the summer months, with some of their last big shipments to box stores occurring the week of my visit. We spent a fair amount of time touring their propagation area, including an automated transplanter that Brie was excited to begin using in the near future. The greenhouse facilities were broken up into two different sites, all of which were passively cooled. The majority were retractable roof greenhouses, with a few utilizing solely roll up sidewalls. It was exciting to see these designs, as greenhouses in Colorado generally rely on active cooling systems. The weather on the day of my visit was perfect for this method of production, which I was told is typical during that time of year.

While I could talk at length about their production and the interesting aspects of their facilities, I would like to focus on how encouraging my interactions with Brie were. She was incredibly engaged in the internship and was enthusiastic about having Kyle on site for the summer. What I was most excited to learn was the breadth of experiences she was aiming to

provide Kyle. For example, as we were discussing their Argus control system, Brie brought up the possibility of having Kyle shadow one of the technicians on site for a day to learn more about the installation and maintenance of this technology. Additionally, I was excited to see that Kyle was tasked with running an experiment alongside Brie to evaluate the use of shade coverings in one of their outdoor gravel spaces. Brie emphasized how great it was to have Kyle as it greatly expanded their capabilities as a team of growers. For example, she mentioned it was difficult for their team to find the time to conduct regular soil analyses (e.g., pH and EC) on their crops, but that having Kyle allowed them to collect this data weekly as they could confidently assign him this task. Kyle was also given an office space on site where he could input and analyze data from his production assignments as well as his experiment. This is just one example, but the main takeaway from my discussion with Brie was that this internship was not only beneficial for Kyle, but also for the production team at Skagit Horticulture. Brie added that they would love to host more interns in the future and for longer durations.



After a lengthy tour, I took Kyle out to a late lunch where we were able to catch up and discuss some of his thoughts about the internship thus far. While working out of state was difficult, Kyle's feedback was incredibly positive, and he seemed genuinely excited about continuing to work through the summer. As Kyle's advisor, I couldn't have been more pleased with the tour and believe he is receiving excellent mentorship from Brie through his time at Skagit Horticulture. I was also encouraged to hear from Brie that Kyle was exceeding expectations and that they were hopeful to have more students in the future. I would like to sincerely thank AFE for supporting faculty trips like this to visit our students, what a great

experience! I took quite a few photos during my visit, if there are any others that would be helpful to include please don't hesitate to let me know.

