

Drew Payton

### Vic and Margaret Ball Internship Report

During the spring semester of 2015 I interned at Tagawa Greenhouses in Brighton, Colorado. Tagawa Greenhouses specializes in plug production of bedding annuals for spring and fall. In the off-peak months of summer they grow finished products for local Home Depots and Costcos. The intern coordinator, Bill Kluth, worked closely with the other intern (Mitchell Haase, University of Wisconsin – River Falls) and me to provide us with some exposure to Tagawa's entire operation.

The internship experience began on January 5<sup>th</sup> with HR paperwork. I spent several days watching safety videos and filling out worksheets based on informational PowerPoints. Fortunately, this only lasted for a few days and before long I was working with departmental supervisors in various departments. Over the first month and a half I spent time in soils, flat filling, seeding, propagation (sticking cuttings on an assembly line), quality assurance, prefinished customer service, seed procurement, Ball transportation, marketing, plug patching, and collation. Needless to say, I stayed very busy. Bill's ideology was to show us how all of these support departments were vital to the success of the plug production. I learned that there is much more to a successful greenhouse than simply growing plants.



After spending time in those various departments Mitchell and I were split up from each other. He would stay in Brighton at the Tagawa North facility while I went to Golden, CO to work at Tagawa Table Mountain. I was placed in Range 4 and worked primarily with a grower named Ryan Jaebker. Our range was almost two acres large and specialized in the production of petunia plugs. I focused on petunia plug production from mid-February through the

beginning of April. It was during this time that I actually received the hands-on production training for which I had hoped. I was responsible for hand and boom irrigation, pesticide applications, scouting, sanitation and algacides, growth regulator applications, and tracking to ensure the crops were on time to meet their shipping specifications.



As the plug season came to an end we transitioned to finished production. My range grew mostly 6- and 12-packs of petunias, marigolds, and vinca. There was a smaller volume of portulaca, echinacea, and a few other bedding flowers. Additionally, we grew several thousand petunia hanging baskets on the rafters and benchtops. I worked in finished production for about six weeks altogether. This was an invaluable experience because I learned firsthand how plug and finished production was vastly different.

My greenhouse production time ended in May. After that I worked with Tagawa's retail merchandising company, InColor, for a few weeks. Mitchell and I traveled to various Home Depot and Costco stores in the Denver area to merchandise the flowers supplied by Tagawa Greenhouses. Next, we worked at Tagawa Gardens for a week. This is an independent retail garden center that was founded by one of the Tagawa brothers but is not directly affiliated with Tagawa Greenhouses. Our time at the garden center provided us with exposure to the retail aspect of the floriculture industry.

The month of June was spent working with departments in the office as well as higher level management. We worked with research and design, IT, distribution, accounting, and several others. This gave us an opportunity to see the business aspects of the company. A greenhouse operation is very similar to any other manufacturing company and requires





greenhouses that operated in the same environment. I was surprised by comradery exhibited by industry “competitors.” I do not believe there is any other industry whose owners willingly share ideas and innovations amongst each other so freely.



American Floral Endowment, the Vic & Margaret Ball Internship and Scholarship Committees, and Tagawa Greenhouses for making this internship possible. You have all provided me with an incredible learning experience and helped guide my future in the industry. I have an opportunity to attend graduate school but fully expect to return to the greenhouse industry when I finish.

the same technologies and support staff. We also had the opportunity to visit other greenhouses in the area in order to speak with their owners and managers. This provided a unique perspective on the Tagawas’ operation because we were able to compare it to similar

Overall, the internship experience was amazing. Not only was I able to learn the intricacies of floriculture production, I gained a valuable understanding of the administrative and logistical support that is necessary to facilitate a successful greenhouse operation. I would like to thank the