

Vic and Margaret Ball Internship Report: Tagawa Greenhouses



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After receiving a Vic and Margaret Ball scholarship, I decided to do my internship at Tagawa greenhouses. They have three facilities around the Denver, Colorado area and one in Estancia, New Mexico that I was able to visit. My internship stretched six months starting in January and going through June. Throughout the Internship I was able to cycle through every department and meet with the supervisor of that department in order to ask questions.

I started in Golden at the Foothills location working for six weeks mainly in operations and also whatever else that needed to be done. My main task there was organizing all of the cuttings that would come in so that the sticking line could keep running smoothly. On days that we would not receive cuttings I would help move plants around in the inventory system to ensure they could be found when it was time to ship. The level of organization at this facility needed to be precise. With a minimum order of one tray, and during the busy weeks of sticking two million+ cuttings, finding one tray of a specific variety could prove to be a challenge. Majority of the people that worked at this facility were refugees; if I was working with 15 people, there may have been 15 different languages that were spoken. This proved to be a challenge but was also rewarding when we could all complete a task without sharing a universal language.

After operations in Golden I started in production at the Brighton facility. I spent my first week here working 15 hour days in the seeding department in order to fill all of the orders that were required. After seeding, I was on the planting line for a few days helping plant various planters mainly using the vegetative liners that were produced at Foothills. I then spent a full 6 weeks with different growers helping out with plug production. Here I learned about water and nutrient management, different care for different crops, PGR/chemical applications/rates, and also about the IPM program. This was the time period that I would say I learned the most, it is truly amazing the specific needs that each crop needs in order to get a uniform and healthy plug tray to ensure the customer receives grade A plants.

From plug production in Brighton, I went to finished production at the Table Mountain facility in Golden. This facility itself was my favorite as it was slightly newer and had a little

more technology compared with the other facilities. While I was at this facility, I was helping produce 6/12 pack annuals for large box stores as well as hanging baskets. At the Brighton facility as well as Golden, watering was done with overhead booms. The booms at Table Mountain were able to be programmed though, instead of manually sending each one back and forth. This was an incredible time/labor saver as well as making large chemical applications easier. If a bench was not completely full of a crop that we wanted to treat with a chemical we could program the boom to turn different valves on and off at certain points.

After my time spent in production, I had the chance to visit Tagawa's facility in Estancia, New Mexico. The two weeks that I was there were the biggest ship weeks of the season. During my time here we were shipping 12-14 semi-trucks of finished product per day. Much of my time was spent helping getting all of the orders pulled and shipped, but I was able to do some other things as well. I helped stick and plant mums for the fall, seeing how this operation differed from the others, and I also got to spend a few days with the succulent stock program. Working with the succulent stock program was the most enjoyable part of my visit to New Mexico. The program was still fairly new so we got to play around with different methods of propagation for different types of succulents to determine what worked best for the growing conditions at that site. The people I was working with in the succulents took a lot of pride in their work and that was enjoyable for me to see also.

After New Mexico I returned to Colorado to start merchandizing. I started by working two weeks at the Home Depot and then one week at Tagawa's garden center. Working at the Home Depot was enjoyable because I was able to see the happiness that the finished product brought to the final customer. I appreciated going from the Home Depot to Tagawa's garden center and seeing the differences. The garden center has been open for many decades now and they are a main part of the community. Majority of the people that worked there had been there for 20+ years and took a lot of pride in their work. Their pride showed in the facility, the plants, as well as how satisfied the customers were when they would leave.

I could not ask anymore from Tagawa, they were an exceptional host. From the first day I got there I truly felt like everyone there was happy to have me and truly wanted to help me learn. Countless times someone would take a large amount of their day to show me something or explain something that I was asking about. Nobody was ever required to do this and it just meant that they needed to stay much later that day in order to get their own personal tasks completed that were required. Never once did I feel that I wasn't part of the "team."

This internship has had a drastic impact on my education. Being able to take everything that I have been learning about in the classroom for years, and see it all in action firsthand is priceless. As I was out in the greenhouse working, all of the dots would start to become connected so to say and why certain things were done the way they were started to become clear. Prior to this internship I thought that it would help me narrow down which direction in the industry that I wanted to head. After the internship, there was never anything that I absolutely hated, so I am going to keep my options open and see where this road heads.



