

Being awarded the Vic and Margaret Ball internship and scholarship has been an irreplaceable opportunity for me. It has given me a unique perspective on the horticulture industry. The experience I obtained from this internship has introduced an excitement in my thinking about how sustainable practices could be used in the industry, including wholesale operations. Heartland Growers was a perfect place to serve this internship due to its large size and diverse, expert employee base.

Heartland Growers is located in Westfield, Indiana. They are a fairly young company with young employees. Heartland covers about 24 acres and houses a variety of different tools and processes. The facility is very impressive. Heartland is a wholesale company and has the capability to move and ship large quantities of plants. They deal primarily with annuals and have a large propagation wing, open roofs, and some glass houses.

I performed many different tasks during my summer with Heartland Growers. The first of which was watering. This is one of the basics to greenhouse growing. I learned boom set up and operation. Booms act as mechanical employees when they are used effectively and I learned how to keep them running in optimal range. Heartland Growers also houses a wing dedicated to flood floors. Again, when used effectively, flood floors can cut down on labor costs and be a very efficient tool in keeping foliage dry. Fertilizer calculations have become second nature for me with help from the staff at Heartland. It is doing the calculation precisely while working in extreme heat that proved difficult. Double checking my work became most important. After working at Heartland about two months, I was given an opportunity to apply beneficial nematodes to chrysanthemums. This was the most exciting part of the experience. I know that if I apply the nematodes correctly no chemical pesticides would be needed and the

chrysanthemums could be sold and advertized in this way. Chrysanthemums suffer from thripp damage and introducing these beneficial insects will control the thripp. This places demand on biological products which make them more accessible and hopefully cheaper. It is important the correct amount is put into the pot so the application is effective and no product is wasted.

I have learned how important communication and organization are from this experience. Being able to communicate effectively with your supervisor and co-workers is a valuable skill and a difficult one to learn because it must be practiced in face-to-face interactions. Organization includes adherence to safety, cleanliness, and being environmentally conscience. If it takes a little longer to do a role in an organized manner I remember it may inherently save money or time in the future.

I now feel comfortable working with greenhouse equipment, doing chemical calculations, talking with co-workers who are planning operations, and sharing my experience with younger students while finishing my degree. My future plans are to learn as much as I can about beneficial insects and conservation in growing facilities. I am also interested in troubleshooting and educating others about sustainable business practices.

Aric Compliment

